

# Montgomery County Criminal Justice Community Plan

2017-2018



December 2017

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## What Is a Community Plan?

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This plan is formally known as the Montgomery 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 Montgomery 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 names of those involved in the process of developing this plan are listed in the following pages under Part II (Community Planning Team).

Though the final draft of this plan was completed in December of 2016, this is a work in progress. As new criminal justice goals are identified, the Planning Team changes as a result of individual and agency circumstances, inclusion of new participants, and requirements concerning the makeup of the Plan that are subject to change from year to year. Thus, Montgomery County is interested in keeping up with these changes, and including such changes 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 Rebecca Ansley, Community Plan Coordinator for Montgomery County, or to the Criminal Justice Program of the Houston-Galveston Area Council. Contact information is provided at the end of this document.

The Montgomery County Commissioners Court supports the concept of community planning by providing staff support and resources for development and implementation of the Montgomery County Criminal Justice 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.

## Areas Represented

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### Incorporated Communities:

Conroe	Cut and Shoot	Portion of Houston	Magnolia
Montgomery	Oak Ridge North	Panorama Village	Patton Village
Roman Forest	Shenandoah	Splendora	Stagecoach
The Woodlands	Willis	Woodbranch	Woodloch

### Unincorporated Communities

Beach	Bobville	Chateau Woods	Dacus
Decker Prairie	Dobbin	Egypt	Fostoria
Grangerland	Groceville	Honea	Karen
Keenen	Midline	Mostyn	Mount Zion
New Caney	Oklahoma	Pinehurst	Porter
Porter Heights	Rayford	Security	Spring
Tamina	Timberland Acres	Ventura	Waukegan
Wigginsville	Youens		

### School Districts:

Conroe	Magnolia
Montgomery	New Caney
Splendora	Willis
Portions of Richards ISD	Portions of Tomball ISD

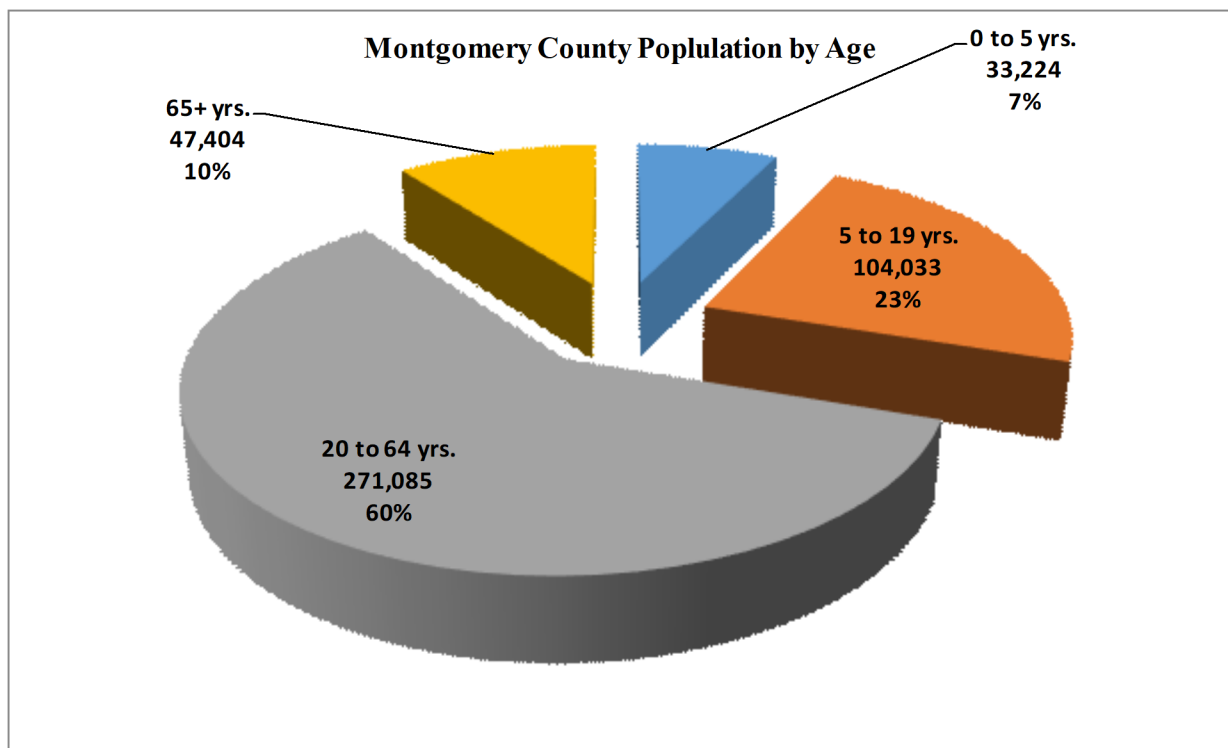
In addition to the independent school districts noted above, Montgomery County is also served by 37 private/parochial schools; one community college system with its administrative offices, two satellite centers and two campuses located within Montgomery County; and one university operating through the University Center. The participating university is Sam Houston State University.

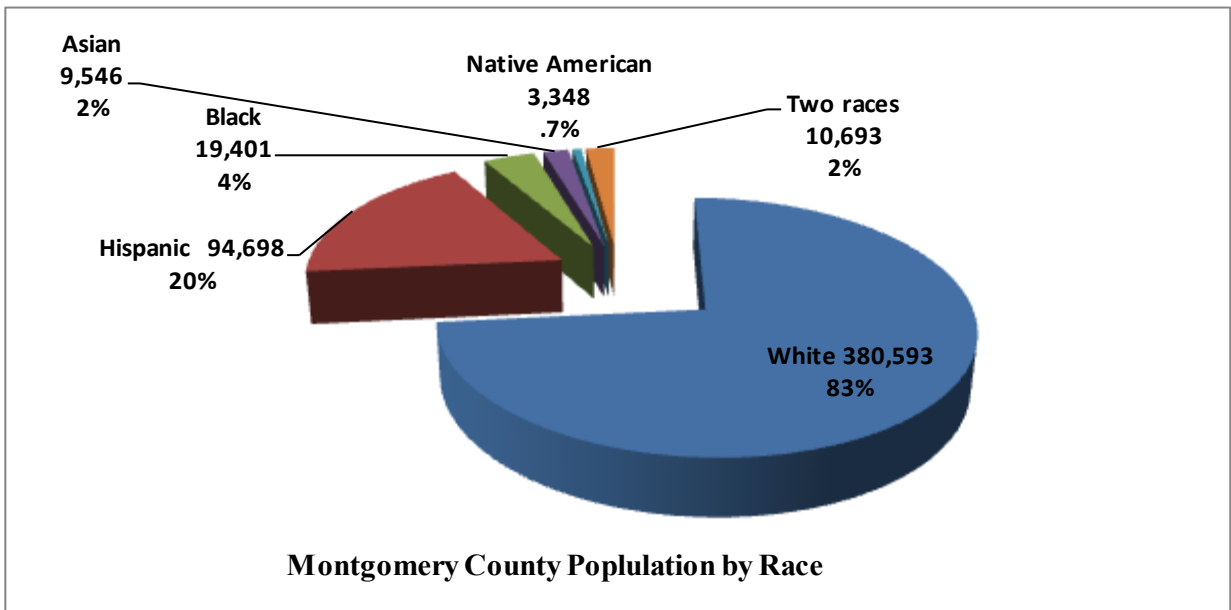
## Brief description and history of Montgomery County:

Montgomery County, located immediately north of Harris County and the City of Houston, is the 13th fastest growing county in the United States in 2014 and the 11th fastest growing in Texas. The 2010 US Census places the population at 455,746, a 55+% increase since the 2000 census. The estimated 2016 population is 556,203. Situated in the southernmost part of the piney woods, Montgomery County covers an area of 1,044 square miles, is the birthplace of the Texas flag and contains Lake Conroe, a 22,000 acre recreational destination.

The largest city and the county seat is Conroe (pop. 62,286). The largest population concentration is in the southern portion of the county, an unincorporated area called The Woodlands (pop. 114,625). The remainder of the county is considered rural or suburban.

In 2017, the median household income was \$72,506 and there were 357,230 persons in the workforce.





**Community Planning Team**

Community Plan Coordinator for Montgomery County: Rebecca Ansley/Grants Administrator/ Department of Purchasing.

In developing this Community Plan, members of the team were divided into six focus groups for the purpose of narrowing the scope of research and data that are incorporated into the Plan. Some members may serve in multiple capacities/categories.

**Juvenile Services:**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Agency</i>
Joanna Comer	Montgomery County Juvenile Probation
Dolores DeLaTorre	Montgomery County Juvenile Probation
Stefanie Perez	Montgomery County Juvenile Probation
Tamra Bryson	Montgomery County Juvenile Probation
Derek Henderson	Montgomery County Juvenile Probation
Alonzo Humphrey	Montgomery County Juvenile Probation
Blaine Johnson	Montgomery County Juvenile Probation



### **Juvenile Services Continued:**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Agency</i>
Gill Pedraza	Montgomery County Juvenile Probation
Amy Cullen	Montgomery County Juvenile Court Supervisor
Sam Rivera	Montgomery County Juvenile Probation
John Bracken	Montgomery County Youth Services
Elaine Roberts	Montgomery County Dispute Resolution Center

### **Victim Services:**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Agency</i>
Vivian Cline	Montgomery County Women's Center
Debi Edge	Montgomery County Women's Center
Anne Litsey	Montgomery County Women's Center
Irene Hegarty	Montgomery County Women's Center
Danielle Steele	Montgomery County Attorney's Office
Elaine Roberts	Montgomery County Dispute Resolution Center
Tamara Young	Montgomery County Sheriff's Office
Penny Wilson	Montgomery County Youth Services
Dr. Victoria Constance PhD	Children's' Safe Harbor
Rachel Portnoy	Texas Dept. of Family and Protective Services

## **Law Enforcement Services:**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Agency</i>
Brady Fitzgerald	Montgomery County Sheriff's Office
James Nowak	Willis Police Department
Tyler Dunman	Montgomery County District Attorney's Office
Andrew James	Montgomery County District Attorney's Office
Philip Cash	Special Investigative Unit
Cheri Olson	Community Supervision and Corrections
David Park	Montgomery County Sheriff's Office
Lori Stevens	Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)

## **Mental Health Services:**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Agency</i>
Lisa Bradt	Tri-County Behavioral Healthcare
Craig Ireland	Tri-County Behavioral Healthcare
Melissa Zemencik	Tri-County Behavioral Healthcare
Susan Badger	Montgomery County Juvenile Probation
Jimmy Shoemaker	A Bridge Forward

**Courts:**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Agency</i>
Nathan Jensen	Director Court of Administration
Gloria Kessler	Mental Health Court Services/Mental Health Treatment Court
Phyllis Rainey	Veteran's Court Administrator
Sara Forlano	County Clerk
Ron Leach	Montgomery County Adult Probation Director

**Veterans Services:**

Ashley Taylor	Tri County Behavioral Healthcare
Henry Molden	Veteran's Affairs MEDVAMC, VJO
Wade Cooper	Veteran's Affairs MEDVAMC, VJO
Eric Hensley	Montgomery County Sheriff's Office

# Identification of Community Problems

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## General Public Safety Needs and Issues

Montgomery County remains an area of contrasts. There are pockets of rural and urban poverty, yet there are numbers of beautiful country clubs. Residences in the county range from transients' shacks to estates valued in excess of one million dollars. With the rapid growth, geographic size of the county, economic disparity, and lack of public transportation, certain problems have been exacerbated over the past few years.

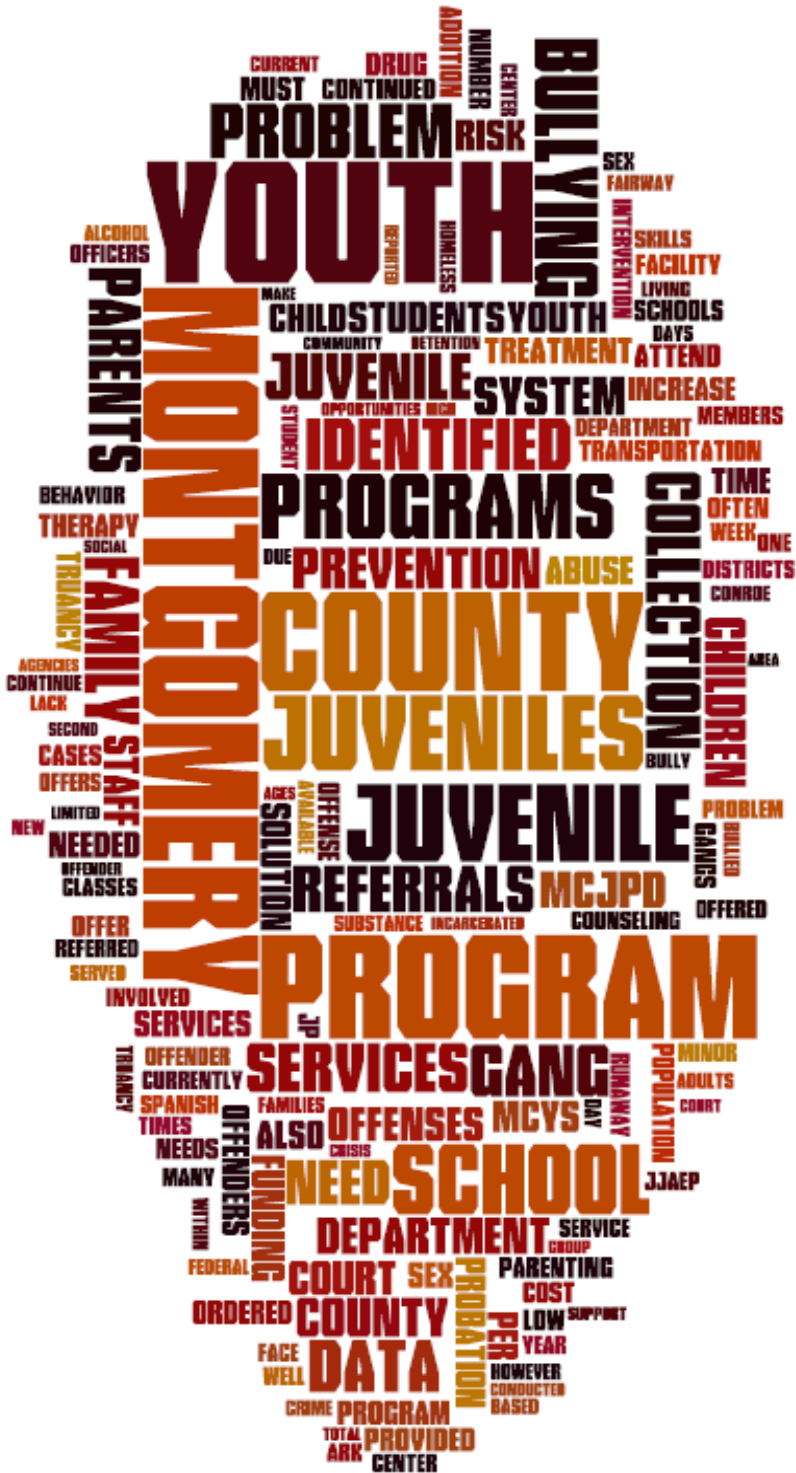
There were 18,921 persons (an average of 51 per day) arrested and jailed in 2016. Also, in that year 4,769 adult and 277 juvenile criminal cases were filed. The jail's average daily population is 899 and the juvenile detention facility has an average population of 32. The use of technology to provide for seamless flow of data for criminal records, mental health information, and speedier adjudication needs to be improved. Innovative use of video camera systems in the criminal justice system would provide better and less stressful service to youth and the mentally ill.

Substance abuse, driving while intoxicated, domestic violence, child sexual abuse, truancy and runaways continue to be chronic issues within the county. While there are some resources within the county, treatment facilities or shelters are needed for substance abuse clients, mentally ill persons, battered women, and foster children. Communications, whether radio inter-operability or memoranda of understanding between concerned agencies, also needs to be addressed in order to enhance public safety. Better communication practices would also enhance when and how victims and others in need of service receive information.

Montgomery County has had some recent notable success in the public safety arena as a result of its Community Planning process. A new mental health crisis stabilization facility was completed in 2011 and a new long-term residence for battered women was completed in 2009. Plans are also being made for a new substance abuse facility for parolees and a new mental health forensic center. The Jail and Detention Mental Health Working Group continues to oversee the jail diversion program for the mentally ill and has begun an intensive program for juvenile offenders with mental illness. Discussions have begun between juvenile probation and various school districts on how they can assist each other more. A new DWI court program began in 2009 and a new Mental Health court began in 2011.

In each of the following areas, problems are identified and data is included that supports both the existence and severity of the problems as they are found in Montgomery County. Following 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.. The problems are listed in priority order within each area, greatest to lowest.

# Juvenile Issues



# Juvenile Issues —

Listed in priority order

## **Identified Problem Data Collection**

<b>Runaway/ Homeless Youth</b>	<p>In 2016, Montgomery County Youth Services (MCYS) conducted crisis intervention services with 22 runaway youth. A total of 331 youth and family members received crisis intervention services to help resolve the family conflict and hopefully prevent runaway behavior.</p> <p><b>Youth &amp; Family Crisis Counseling Services</b> are provided at no cost to clients and address many types of issues related to youth and family conflict that may lead to runaway behaviors and was provided to over 1,301 youth and their families in 2016.</p> <p><b>BridgeWay</b> is a co-ed 15 bed facility. It provides a short-term shelter program for youth ages 10-17 that are in need of safety, security, support and structure. Many of the youth we see are runaways, homeless, or abused and neglected youth. Services include the provision of 24/7 crisis intervention for all runaway and family violence cases in Montgomery County. Counselors meet with the family and youth to discuss the crisis, create a plan of action to alleviate family stress and tensions, and reunite the family. When family reunification is not immediately possible, BridgeWay offers a short-term placement option. The primary goal is to reunify the family, strengthen family relationships and improve communication. BridgeWay served a total of 94 youth in 2016.</p> <p><b>Street Outreach</b> (SOS) offers services for youth between the ages 10-21 who are runaways, homeless or living in the streets. Youth are provided assistance in finding safe shelter, given basic survival supplies, and offered on-going support. For the 2016-2017 school year, the school districts in Montgomery County reported at least 1,278 homeless youth who were attending school. From October 1, 2015-September 30, 2016, 89 crisis calls were received by SOS staff, 121 youth received extended services including transportation to supportive services, back to home, relative's home or shelter, counseling crisis and family intervention. MCYS lost the Street Outreach funding in October 2016 and so they will no longer be able to provide Street Outreach Services to youth over the age of 18.</p> <p>In 2014, MCYS, Angel Reach, and CASA formed collaboration with funding from United Way to begin the Community Youth Outreach (CYO) program which reaches out to homeless youth ages 16-24 and provides them with necessary assistance such as housing, food, clothing medical care, etc. The project director and Youth Advocates are located at the CYO in the downtown Conroe area.</p>
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# Juvenile Issues —

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem    Data Collection*

Runaway / Homeless Youth (continued)	<p>The number of Runaways reported to MCJPD are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2010: 114 referrals for Runaway Behavior</li> <li>• 2011: 90 referrals for Runaway Behavior</li> <li>• 2012: 97 referrals for Runaway Behavior</li> <li>• 2013: 99 referrals for Runaway Behavior</li> <li>• 2014: 64 referrals for Runaway Behavior</li> <li>• 2015: 25 referrals for Runaway Behavior</li> <li>• 2016: 46 referrals for Runaway Behavior</li> </ul> <p>MCJPD heavily depends upon MCYS to provide services to runaway youth.</p>
<p><b><i>Solution:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although these programs operated by MCYS provide some of the services needed for runaway and homeless youth, there is a chronic lack of funding which limits the number and types of kids who can be served.</li> </ul>	

Juvenile Sex Offenses	<p>Sex offenses committed by juveniles continues to be a serious problem in Montgomery County as evident by the following information regarding referred cases for felony level sexual assault offense:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>2012:</b> 52 referrals</li> <li>• <b>2013:</b> 53 referrals</li> <li>• <b>2014:</b> 57 referrals</li> <li>• <b>2015:</b> 64 referrals</li> <li>• <b>2016:</b> 76 referrals</li> </ul> <p>Over the past five years the number of sex offender referrals to the department has continued at a concerning level.</p> <p>The Center for Sex Offender Management (CSOM) recommends cognitive behavioral group therapy conducted in close collaboration with the Juvenile Probation Department. CSOM further recommends multi-systemic therapy as the most promising in reducing the risk of recidivism. This involves intensive family and community-based treatment that addresses serious anti social behavior in juvenile sex offenders. Current juvenile court procedure regarding sexual offenses varies based on the needs of each individual. The vast majority of juvenile offenders attend frequent multi-systemic therapy. Those individuals that are either not appropriate for group settings or who refuse to comply with offered multi-systemic therapy are required to attend individual therapy.</p> <p>Montgomery County Juvenile Probation Department (MCJPD) currently offers an intensive multi-systemic therapy program for juvenile offenders.</p>
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# Juvenile Issues —

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem*

## *Data Collection*

Juvenile Sex Offenses (continued)

This program is offered at no cost to the participant and his/her family. MCJPD currently has two designated Sex Offender Specific Probation Officers to handle all cases of juvenile sex offenders who are placed onto probation. The officers are assisted with monitoring the cases by the Department's full time Juvenile Probation Surveillance team who conducts field visits throughout the day and evening times. For juvenile sex offenders, the surveillance officers must make two face to face contacts with the juvenile per week. If the offender is doing well or has other special circumstances they are placed on part-time surveillance which requires the officers to make one face to face contact per week. The contacts with the assigned Juvenile Probation Officer vary, but are within the range of one to four face to face contacts per month. The youth will start with four contacts and have the ability to work down to one if doing well in all aspects of the program.

Sexual offenders are required to attend group counseling one time per week for two hours and individual counseling as deemed appropriate. The juvenile probation department has contracts with four Licensed Sex Offender Therapists. One of the therapist's is Spanish speaking. The LSOTP counselors' use either the Journey Program Therapy model or the Pathways Program Therapy model when providing treatment. The parents are required to attend parent group two times a month for an hour and a half each session. Female sex offenders do not attend a group setting, but instead attend individual counseling one time per week.

Polygraphs are conducted every six months as maintenance for reoffending. There are special polygraphs, which are conducted as necessary, such as instant offense, monitoring, and sexual history. Every offender must also submit to a sexual history polygraph and must continue submitting to that until they pass that particular polygraph. The sexual history polygraph is used as a treatment tool by the provider to identify patterns of negative behaviors and deviant thought patterns. The juvenile's family is required to pay for these polygraphs, which are \$300.00 each. Over the course of a supervision term, each juvenile will be required to complete 4-6 polygraphs on average.

Sex offender cases are extremely time intensive for the two juvenile prosecutors, requiring extensive investigation and review of forensic interview information prior to accepting the case. Frequently, this intensiveness results in the decision to accept plea bargains which at times leads to reduced charges with equally reduced requirements for therapy and, therefore, the possibility of escalating consequences for violations.



# Juvenile Issues —

Listed in priority order

***Solution:***

- Add funding to update Sex Offender Treatment programming materials as needed.
- Add funding to assist in sex offender placement for juvenile offenders in need of more structured programming.
- Also, the use of polygraphs is a critical piece of managing and supervising the sex offender population. Additional funding could be implemented to both assist those families struggling to pay for these polygraphs and allow for more frequent polygraphs when necessary.

***Identified Problem Data Collection***

Substance Abuse/  
Dependence,  
Prevention and  
Treatment

**Alcohol Usage:**

Mothers Against Drunk Driving shared information indicating that Teen alcohol use kills about 4,700 people each year. Montgomery County continues to experience problems with teens consuming alcoholic beverages. The County’s five (5) Justice of the Peace courts have reported ticketing minors for the following offenses:

January 1, 2016-December 31, 2016

<u>Class C Misdemeanor Offenses:</u>	<u>Number of Citations Issued to Minors:</u>
Minor in Possession (alcohol)	204
Minor Consuming Alcohol	223

**Drug Abuse:**

Regarding drug offenses, Montgomery County Juvenile Probation Department (MCJPD) received 47 felony drug offense referrals and 136 Class A and B misdemeanor offense referrals for a total of 183 referrals for drug offenses in the calendar year 2016. Due to the elusive nature of synthetic drugs, these figures do not capture numbers associated with those trends. Despite the destructive path synthetic drugs leave behind these substances continue to escape detection and legal ramifications.

There is a lack of treatment and prevention services in the county. There are only three agencies providing substance abuse out-patient treatment for non-MCJPD youth across Montgomery County that are recognized by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). These agencies are:

- Tri-County Services
- The Right Step in The Woodlands, and
- Memorial Hermann Hospital

# Juvenile Issues —

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem*

## *Data Collection*

<p>Substance Abuse/ Dependence, Prevention and Treatment (continued)</p>	<p>Only Tri-County Services can consistently provide outpatient services to uninsured youth and youth with Medicaid or CHIPs; however this program is largely dependent on local and state funding with no guarantee of future funding. Also, this program’s funding does not fully cover needed outreach, sober activities, aftercare, and 12-step support groups. Since many of the youth in Tri-County’s outpatient program have not yet been mandated by courts to participate, retention throughout the full course of treatment varies. There is no publicly funded residential treatment for youth in Montgomery County and only a few substance abuse prevention programs in the county which is provided by Montgomery County Youth Services (MCYS) in Conroe schools, Tri-County Services, Shattered Lives program, and MCJPD prevention/diversion programming. Many families lack transportation or afterschool resources to get their children and youth to prevention activities afterschool. Tri-County Services can offer evidence-based Prevention Skills Training Groups for at-risk children and youth, prevention activities, and prevention presentations in the schools, if schools will allow.</p> <p>MCJPD provides two (2) substance abuse programs to youth referred to the probation department. The least restrictive is Early Recovery Skills. This program consists of an 8 week long drug education group. The second program is a juvenile drug court which has an intensive three (3) phase level system involving relapse-prevention groups, individual counseling, education groups, social-support groups, UA testing, and bi-weekly judicial review hearings</p>
<p><b><i>Solution:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mentoring programs and local residential treatment facilities are needed</li><li>• Tri-County Services’ current outpatient treatment program for uninsured youth and youth with Medicaid or CHIPs is largely dependent on local and state funding with no guarantee of future funding; a long-term and more expansive funding source is needed,</li><li>• More courts need to order the youth and family to substance abuse programs early on due to some families being unmotivated to participate throughout the full course of treatment until the problem and legal involvement escalates. and</li><li>• Evidenced-based prevention services need to be implemented in all services that are publicly funded</li><li>• More schools need to allow agencies with evidence-based Prevention Services to offer services in the schools as youth and families often lack the transportation and afterschool resources for participation in such services</li><li>• Use of MADD Programming for parent/child workshops to educate on the dangers associated with substance abuse</li><li>• Begin to form a Prevention Services provider meeting to discuss the needs and ways to improve the existing infrastructure with evidenced based practices and collaborations to secure needed funding</li></ul>	

# Juvenile Issues —

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

<b>Lack of Parenting Skills</b>	<p>Recent juvenile justice policies are attempting to move from a more punitive response to youth crime to more rehabilitative goals for the juvenile court. The zero tolerance policies, mandatory minimum sentences, efforts to try juveniles as adults, as well as proposals to abolish juvenile court entirely have all failed and proven to be ineffective. Despite the decrease in juvenile crime, there are an increasing number of young people entering the juvenile and criminal justice systems (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2001). Incarceration is not an effective crime deterrent. We must get away from punitive programs and emphasize effective programs which focus on prevention and appropriate treatment. We can no longer afford to allow kids to see themselves as unimportant “losers”. Children not only have less and less respect for authority, including parents, teachers and police, but they also have less and less respect for themselves.</p> <p>Research shows that the establishment of a loving caring relationship between parents, teachers, and the child helps to create supportive environment. Michael Satarino, principal of the number one high school in America per Newsweek Magazine, says that “Kids don’t care how much you know they just want to know you care”.</p> <p>Over 21,000 children in Montgomery County live in poverty. From September 2016 to August 2017, there were 4,228 alleged victims of child abuse/neglect with 3,067 confirmed victims in Montgomery County. Of the 3,067 confirmed, 283 of them were removed from their home.</p> <p>In regards to youth with incarcerated parents, 51% of the youth who have been incarcerated multiple times have had a parent that has been incarcerated. Twelve Stones for Hi Lo Lane, Inc. is an organization in Montgomery County that has provided communication skills’ training to children of incarcerated persons and their “in-the-home” parents.</p> <p><b>Current Efforts:</b> Montgomery County Youth Services is providing the Active Parenting Program for Spanish speaking families only at this time. It is an 8 week program offered in the Fall and Spring. In this program, parents are taught parenting and communication skills.</p> <p>The JJAEP (Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program) also offers the ARK (Adults Relating to Kids) parenting empowerment program to parents of students who are expelled from public schools within Montgomery County into the program.</p> <p>The target population of the MCYS Healthy Supports program is youth under the age of 21, living in underserved areas in East Montgomery County who are pregnant, parenting, or at-risk of becoming pregnant. The program focuses on the prevention of high-risk behaviors, incorporates asset-based approaches to strengthen self-sufficiency, safe and healthy parenting styles, positive relationship building and plans for continuing educational or training opportunities.</p>
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# Juvenile Issues —

Listed in priority order

## ***Identified Problem    Data Collection***

<b>Lack of Parenting Skills (continued)</b>	<p>The program is comprised of targeted prevention groups conducted in the schools as well as counseling or case management services that are offered at MCYS’ satellite offices. In 2016, 1,092 youth participated in the program. Although Healthy Supports offers much needed services, they are currently limited to the east portion of Montgomery County in the Splendora New Caney School Districts, but MCYS is planning to train all counselors in 2018 on Healthy Supports curriculum to increase the reach of the program.</p> <p>MCYS also offers their “Decisions” program and other family skills groups to juveniles and their families who are referred by the JP court to attend the class. In 2016, 97 clients (48 youth and 49 parents) participated in Decisions Parent and Youth Skills Group.</p> <p>The Decisions Workshop has been offered to the school districts as a solution to their truancy problems. Starting in 2018 Decisions Workshops will start in the New Caney area specifically to address truancy issues in the New Caney school district.</p> <p>Tri-County Services (TCS) offers the Nurturing Parenting program, Family Support Groups, and Family Partner support to the caretakers of children and youth receiving mental health services. The support groups are held monthly in Conroe.</p> <p>The Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County, Inc. (DRC-MC) currently offers monthly classes in developing conflict resolution skills at the JJAEP to help youth develop strategies for addressing conflict in a positive, non-violent manner.</p>
<b><i>Solution:</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The effect on the youth can be reduced through the use of a research based parenting program like Active Parenting of Teens, 1-2-3 Magic Effective Discipline for Children, Aggression Replacement Training, and Assessment and Parent Training for Defiant Children and Teens. More courts need to order the youth and family to parenting programs due to the families being reluctant to attend these classes. If this occurred MCYS would need to offer their parenting program into the central, north and south portions of Montgomery County. These programs also need to expand into local schools as well as continuing programming needs to be provided by Twelve Stones for Hi Lo Inc. to serve children of incarcerated parents. All of this would definitely require more ear-marked funding.</li></ul>	

# Juvenile Issues —

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

Language Barrier Created by the Lack of Bilingual Law Enforcement/Juvenile Justice Officers and Social Service Related Staff in Montgomery County and Lack of Participation in ESL Classes

The Hispanic population is the second highest population in Montgomery County, According to the latest United States Census Bureau 2015, the Hispanic Population makes up 23.5% of the entire county. A large portion of this population uses Spanish as their primary language. Concerning juveniles involved with the Montgomery County Juvenile Probation Department (MCJPD), in 2016 there were 971 formal referrals, of which 34.1% of the juveniles were Hispanic (331).

There is a persistent growing problem with verbal communication between Hispanic clients/families and law enforcement/social service staff trying to assist them. Compounding this problem is the difficulty the corrections and social services fields in Montgomery County have in recruiting and hiring qualified bilingual applicants, who can effectively communicate with clients and understand their cultural needs. This is primarily due to the corrections and social services fields' inability to compete with larger corporate or federal agencies that draw these applicants into their fields by much higher salaries and benefits. Most of the area school districts and churches offer English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for both juveniles and adults. Unfortunately, participation by parents is often limited due to lack of knowledge of programs available, costs, work and the fear of "the system." Local churches offer ESL classes to the public free of charge such as First Baptist Church of Conroe. Corrections (adult probation) utilizes the Oscar Johnson Community Center to refer Spanish-speaking probationers that have been court ordered to attend ESL classes. Montgomery County Youth Services (MCYS) has 2 Hispanic Bilingual Counselors in their Conroe Office, 1 in their Woodlands Office, 1 in their Magnolia office and 1 in their New Caney office. These counselors work with Hispanic families to reduce discord in the family and keep kids in school. The overarching goal is to keep them out of the juvenile justice and/or child welfare systems.

Tri-County Services' Child and Adolescent mental health program has a Hispanic Bilingual Licensed Clinician and four Hispanic Bilingual Qualified Mental Health Providers providing services throughout Montgomery County. Although there is bilingual staff available to help those with mental health needs, there is still a lack of bilingual counselors for the Substance Abuse Program offered at Tri-County. Currently, there are no bilingual counselors for their program. Tri-County works with their staff translators in order to provide services to the Hispanic community. The need for bilingual providers is widely needed with the continuing growth of the Hispanic population.

The Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County, Inc. (DRC-MC) has a limited number of bilingual mediators available to help Spanish speaking families resolve disputes within the family and/or community. The DRC-MC is seeking additional funding to train bilingual mediators so that mediations in Spanish may be offered every day of the week instead of on a limited basis.

# Juvenile Issues —

Listed in priority order

***Solution:***

- Establish a recruitment method to attract dual language applicants.
- Offer stipend or monetary compensation to qualified bilingual staff.
- Incorporate the use of bilingual counseling interns that could assist the County in bridging the cultural diversities and barriers with the Spanish-speaking families and in our community.
- Continue to offer incentives such as receiving community service hours for the successful completion of English Second Language classes supported by Montgomery County JPD.
- Provide opportunities to create awareness, and educate families about their rights and obligations.
- Reach out to Montgomery County local agencies and non-profits in an effort to collaborate and join forces to assist Spanish-speaking families with available services.

***Identified Problem Data Collection***

Truancy	<p>New legislation decriminalized Truancy effective September 1, 2015. According to the Texas Education Code 25.094, a juvenile commits the offense of “Failure to Attend” if the juvenile fails to attend school: On 10 or more days or parts of days within a 6-month period in the same school year Failure to Attend behavior is typically symptomatic of underlying issues in the home or at school. Addressing these underlying issues will require collaborative efforts to isolate and identify the specific needs of individuals engaging in this conduct. The goal being that every student in the county graduate or obtain his/her GED. There is an increased need for community based services as legislation changes no longer enable a Truancy Program supervised by Montgomery County Juvenile.</p> <p>Truancy referrals within this County are handled by the respective school districts and five (5) Justice of the Peace (JP) courts.</p>		
	Justice of the Peace Pct.	Truant Conduct Cases Filed	Parents Contributing to Non Attendance
	JP 1 Wayne Mack	14	35
	JP 2 Trey Spikes	159	0
	JP 3 Edie Connelly	77	32
	JP 4 James Metts	37	102
	JP 5 Matt Masden	40	16
	Magnolia ISD Truancy Officers	21	11

# Juvenile Issues —

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

<p>Truancy (continued)</p>	<p>Previously only 3 districts within the county had designated Truancy officers. House bill 2398 led school districts to restructure and change procedures. Each District must have a truancy prevention facilitator. Schools are now required to hold truancy prevention meetings with students and parents after three undocumented absences. Once Truancy has been determined, parents are subject to criminal prosecution if it can be proven they are negligent or contributing to their child’s truancy. Students 12 years of age or older may be referred to Truancy court. Those 11 and under cannot be referred to a Truancy Court, but parents may still be held accountable despite the child’s age.</p> <p>In addition, school districts are now under the requirement to institute additional prevention measures before a student can be filed on for being truant, and referred to the JP Court. School Districts are actively working to keep these students on track and in school. For instance, better communication with the parent/guardian, referring families and Response to Intervention (RTI) are all efforts made before sending cases to the various JP courts. If the case is referred to the JP courts extra costs are accumulated due to the additional resources required.</p> <p>The five (5) Justice of the Peace courts are forced to juggle these cases which can be both high in number and high in need. With the new legislation from this past session taking in effect, truancy filings are no longer a criminal matter. The court now serves as Truancy Court and the Judge takes on the role of a Truancy Magistrate in the civil matter addressing this issue. Petitions for Truancy must go through the District Attorney’s Office and a Truancy Prosecutor. Despite the volume the JP Courts are tirelessly working to address the needs of students and the school districts with one rotating prosecutor.</p> <p>Montgomery County Youth Services continues to offer their “Decisions” program and other family skills groups to juveniles and their families who are ordered by the JP court to attend the class. In 2016, 97 clients (48 youth and 49 parents) participated in Decisions Parent and Youth Skills Group. The Decisions Workshop has been offered to the school districts as a solution to their truancy problems.</p> <p>MCYS also offers individual and family counseling to address many types of issues related to a juveniles and one of them is truancy. While in counseling, the juvenile will explore and resolve feelings, thoughts and behaviors. On the other hand, the counselor meets with parents and guardians to ensure family awareness, cooperation, and effective communication and to share the results of the counseling progress.</p>
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# Juvenile Issues —

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

Truancy (continued)	The Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County, Inc. (DRC-MC) continues to offer volunteer mediators for truancy mediations so that parents, caregivers, students and schools can come together to find a mutually agreeable and fair solution for student truancy issues. In a confidential mediation facilitated by a trained mediator, the parties can talk about the causes of absences and tardiness and how these problems which can be resolved. Studies of truancy mediations have shown that early mediation of attendance concerns: (1) fosters positive change and compliance with truancy laws; (2) improves communication between families and schools and (3) reduces the number of truancy referrals to JP courts. Unfortunately, truant teens are not currently being referred to the DRC-MC for truancy mediations even though other types of teen mediations are being successfully mediated at the DRC-MC.
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### *Solution:*

- Prevention and Intervention activities should illustrate collaboration amongst the school districts, JP Courts, and organizations that exist in the county
- Additional caseworkers and counselors from Montgomery County Youth Services working in the schools are necessary to meet the demands of the truancy issue. Conducting after-school workshops and utilizing an effective curriculum for parents and students is imperative. As with many programs and workshops, the cost of transportation for the family is an expense that most agencies are not able to provide
- Truancy may be reduced if more courts order the youth and family to needed mental health and substance abuse programs due to families being reluctant to seek and maintain such services. Funding for the development of a collaborative program between mental health services and the truancy court systems for the screening of such needs would be beneficial
- Additional funding for a Truancy Prosecutor would enable more time to be spent on these high need cases
- Appropriate truancy cases should be referred to the Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County, Inc. (DRC-MC) for truancy mediation as part of Montgomery County School District preventative measures to address student absences and tardiness. Truancy mediations allow parents, caregivers, students and schools to find a fair and workable solution to student truancy problems and if agreement cannot be reached these cases can still be referred Justice of the Peace Courts for handling

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

Bullying	According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) bullying occurs when “a person is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself. It is behavior that involves unwanted, negative actions over time and an imbalance of power.” Cyberbullying occurs when information
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# Juvenile Issues —

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem    Data Collection*

<p>Bullying (continued)</p>	<p>and communication technologies are used to “support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others.” <i>See</i> “Coordinated School Health –Bullying and Cyberbullying” on <a href="http://tea.tex.gov">tea.tex.gov</a>. Under the Texas Education Code § 37.01, bullying can occur either at school or at a school-related events. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, 160,000 children skip school each day due to fear of being bullied.</p> <p>In 2015, nearly 21% of students reported being bullied at school and meta-analysis of bullying studies indicates a mean prevalence rate of traditional bullying at 35% and cyberbullying at 15%. (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016 and Modecki, Minchin, Harbaugh, Guerra &amp; Runions, 2014). Significantly, research indicates that 64% of students who are bullied do not report it to anyone (Petrosina, Guckenburg, DeVoe, &amp; Hanson, 2010) and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine have determined that cyberbullying is now a serious public health problem in this country. David’s Law (SB 179), named after a Texas youth who committed suicide after being harassed and threatened through social media, acknowledged the seriousness of this problem in Texas, and makes cyberbullying a misdemeanor offense since September 1, 2017.</p> <p>U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2017) indicates that in 2015 students who reported being bullied at school also reported the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>13.3 % were made fun of, called names, or insulted;</li><li>12.3% were the subject of rumors;</li><li>3.9% were threatened with harm;</li><li>2.5% were coerced to try to make them do things they did not want to do;</li><li>5.0% were excluded from activities on purpose;</li><li>1.8% had property destroyed by others on purpose; and</li><li>5.1% were pushed, shoved, tripped, or spit on.</li></ul> <p>Based on teacher and youth surveys, it is believed that bullying (both traditional and cyberbullying) are significant issues in Montgomery County schools and follow national and/or statewide trends. Further investigation of the prevalence of bullying in Montgomery County schools is recommended but since federal funds for safe and healthy schools were discontinued, campuses have limited funding for anti-bullying campaigns.</p> <p>Children and youth who are bullied are more likely than other children to be depressed, lonely or anxious; have low self-esteem; feel unwell; and think about suicide. They often withdraw from family events and activities they used to enjoy, refuse to go to school and have changed appetites and difficulty sleeping.</p>
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# Juvenile Issues —

Listed in priority order

## ***Identified Problem Data Collection***

<b>Bullying (continued)</b>	<p>They often withdraw from family events and activities they used to enjoy, refuse to go to school and have changed appetites and difficulty sleeping. These negative effects of bullying can continue into adulthood. <i>See</i> <a href="https://www.stopbullying.gov/at-risk/effects/index.html">https://www.stopbullying.gov/at-risk/effects/index.html</a> . Significantly, 30% of students (including those who have been bullied themselves) admit to bullying other students.</p> <p>Studies show that children who have a workable plan on how to respond to bullying feel safer, more confident and “less likely to be hurt by mean behavior of their peers.” <a href="http://www.biggerthanbullies.com/index.cfm/parents-educators">http://www.biggerthanbullies.com/index.cfm/parents-educators</a> With that in mind, since 2014 the Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County, Inc. (DRC-MC) has sponsored an Annual Conflict Resolution Day Bookmark Art Contest_for Montgomery County students in grades K-8. This program promotes classroom and at-home discussions about constructive problem solving (such as peer mediation, respecting differences, listening, practicing tolerance, etc.) as alternatives to violence and bullying. Students then submit an original bookmark drawing which promotes their plan to combat bullying and these bookmarks are publically displayed in the Montgomery County Memorial Library and distributed throughout Montgomery County schools. In 2017, over 1900 students from 44 Montgomery County public and private schools, as well as home schooled children in Montgomery County, participated in the DRC-MC’s contest. Over 15,000 of the prize winning bookmarks have been reproduced for distribution throughout the county. The Conflict Resolution Day Bookmark The Art Contest not only helps students develop constructive ways to address bullying and school conflicts, it also gives teachers and parents an opportunity to discuss this difficult topic with students in a meaningful and productive way. If more funding were available, the DRC-MC-would be able to reach out to even more students across Montgomery County. There are numbers of reasons why adults should be concerned about bullying among children and youth. These reasons range from the prevalence of the problem to the impact on children who bully. It should be noted that bullying plays a major role in situations involving school violence. According to the Bureau of Justice, “about 87 percent of students say school shootings are motivated by the desire to get back at those who have hurt them. About 86 percent in this study cite bullying as the reason kids turn to lethal violence.” Adults must not only be watchful for signs of bullying among the children and youth that they work with, but they should also be sensitive to possible bullying of children by adults, as well.</p> <p>In 2014, Montgomery County Youth Services (MCYS) in collaboration with Children’s Safe Harbor (CSH) activated an initiative funded by United Way to stop abuse, neglect and violence against children within the county by educating community leaders, youth care providers and parents on recognizing the signs of child abuse and assisting these youth through their crisis. MCYS also educated youth, adolescents and child care employees on prevention techniques to avoid violence and create a healthier and happier life.</p>
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# Juvenile Issues —

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

<b>Bullying (continued)</b>	<p>A portion of this program included presentations within Montgomery County schools on Cyberbullying and Bullying. This information was presented to 2,295 students in grades 6 – 12. There were also 85 adults who participated in workshops to raise awareness of the signs of child abuse, neglect and assault.</p>
<p><b><i>Solution:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevention activities should illustrate collaboration amongst the school districts and the organizations that exist in the county</li> <li>• Utilize programs sponsored by the Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County, Inc (DRC-MC). The DRC-MC offers mediation services and conflict resolution training to all Montgomery County residents, including students. With the assistance of volunteer mediators, individuals learn techniques which help to minimize conflict, promote tolerance and understanding, and improve communication so that conflicts do not escalate into violence or bullying. Additionally, students throughout Montgomery County should be encouraged to participate in the DRC-MC’s Annual Conflict Resolution Day Bookmark Art Contest <u>which</u> starts at the beginning of each new school year. Close attention should be paid to protecting students who are most likely to be targeted by bullies. Although bullying can affect any young person, LGBTQ youth, children with disabilities, girls and black students tend to experience a higher percentage of bullying</li> <li>• Adults must not only be watchful for signs of bullying among the children and youth that they work with, but they should also be sensitive to possible bullying of children by adults, as well</li> </ul> <p>-Additional prevention activities should adhere to Best practice guidelines as outlined below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on the social environment of the school</li> <li>• Assess bullying at your school</li> <li>• Obtain staff and parent buy-in and support for bullying prevention</li> <li>• Form a group to coordinate the school’s bullying prevention activities</li> <li>• Provide training for school staff in bullying prevention</li> <li>• Establish and enforce school rules and policies related to bullying</li> <li>• Increase adult supervision in “hot spots” for bullying</li> <li>• Intervene consistently and appropriately when you see bullying</li> <li>• Devote some class time to bullying prevention</li> <li>• Continue these efforts</li> </ul> <p>*This information is based, in part, on: Limber, S.P. (2004, Winter). “What works – and doesn’t work-in bullying prevention and intervention.” Student Assistance Journal. 16-19.</p>	

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

<b>Gang Affiliation</b>	<p>The Montgomery County Juvenile Probation Department (MCJPD) continues to see slight increase in gang affiliation among juveniles in Montgomery County. Since 2013, there was an actual increase of 61 juveniles, 19 of which were suspected to be involved in gangs. While our number of total referrals, 992 had decreased to the MCJPD for the 2013 year, the increase in gang involvement may be attributed to our probation officers being able to identify those juveniles.</p>
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# Juvenile Issues —

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem      Data Collection*

<p>Gang Affiliation (continued)</p>	<p>This is due to training and using Motivational Interviewing skills which requires specific questions and listening in order to gather more information from juveniles. For 2014, these numbers continue to increase slightly with 65 juveniles being documented as in a gang with 22 of those being listed as suspected gang involvement. The amount of all referrals to the Probation Department also showed an increase for 2014 with the total number being 1027. For 2015 the Department continued with a slight increase of 67 juveniles being identified as gang members, out of the 67 juveniles 20 of them are suspected gang members. The total number of department wide referrals also slightly increased to 1030. For the 2016 year, there was an actual decrease in gang affiliation with numbers showing 60 juveniles with a gang affiliation. Of those 60, 20 juveniles were listed at suspected. The total number of department wide referrals had also shown a decrease with 929 juveniles for the 2016 year.</p> <p>Montgomery County continues to be one of the fastest growing counties in the state as the population increases each year, which gives gangs the opportunity to recruit new members. The gangs are looking for juveniles who are not being supervised by parents/guardians, may be living in the same neighborhood and/or want acceptance from their “peers” to conduct their illegal activities. The schools within the county also need to continue to be on the lookout for gang activity on campuses and not allow the wearing of gang paraphernalia which tends to be how the kids advertise their gang memberships. Gang intelligence has informed us that gang leaders continue to instruct their members to not get tattoos and to give little information as possible to law enforcement in efforts to maintain a low profile. As a result, juveniles who are really involved in the gangs have not been getting tattoos and have not been wearing the colors often associated with the gangs. However, here lately these juveniles have been blatantly wearing their colors with total disregard to these instructions and have increased their involvement in illegal activities. The MCJPD had even at one time given juveniles a chance to remove tattoos but only a few were interested and others changed their mind not wanting to totally give up their gang image. Juveniles continue to be secretive and have not been forthcoming with information regarding their suspected gang affiliation or refuse to give any information about what they know, or who they associate with. On the streets, it is not wise to be a “snitch” and they do not want to face retaliation.</p> <p>Our Probation Officers need to continue to build a rapport with these juveniles and their parents by getting to know them and other family members who associate with the juvenile. In the past years, we have been able to help the families by ordering identified negative peers or family members to stay away from the juvenile to protect them. Our officers need to also continue working with local law enforcement in identifying gang members in the area as well as for our own protection by going out with us when we visit the homes.</p>
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# Juvenile Issues —

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem    Data Collection*

### **Gang Affiliation (continued)**

Social media still continues to be a very important communication tool for juveniles and the adults in gangs. It is being used for recruitment and advertisement for the gangs. They are using Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Kik for recruiting, to communicate with each other and to post any news about their gangs. Social media has become such an important part of a teen's life or sometimes even the only interaction, rather than actual positive personal interactions as in the past. Gang leaders know this and use it to their advantage to reach these juveniles. Social media also allows gangs to communicate with other gang members and gang sets over long distances. Parents/guardians/probation and law enforcement need to monitor usage of social media by juveniles. Parents/guardians need to make sure social media does not take the place of their own family. According to law enforcement sources, gangs within the county and city of Conroe are now working together for financial gain and distribution of illegal narcotics. Gang leaders are targeting, recruiting and brainwashing juveniles to think that becoming a gang member will gain them power, respect and money in the streets and using them to do the gangs' street level crimes and dirty work. According to gang expert, Officer Juan Saucedo there are currently over 100 recognized gangs within Montgomery county and the city of Conroe. Some of these gangs are well structured and organized. Membership has increased within the city limits as well as in the county with the current count being about 600 documented gang members for the city and 1,400 documented gang members county wide. However, there is still an unknown amount of undocumented gang members. Law enforcement continues to document gang membership and gang involvement and is a combined effort with the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office, the Montgomery County Juvenile Probation Department and the Conroe Police Department. They continue to aggressively interviewing and document these gang members.

The Texas Attorney General has reported that gang members are normally between the ages of 10 and 21. Sometimes the ages can be younger if there is an older sibling, parent, or relative in the home who is a gang member. Most of these juveniles have not done well in school, are not involved in any positive activities and have little to no parental involvement in their lives. We have also found that these juveniles come from single parent families that have no father or father figure present in their lives at all. The gang leaders know these juveniles want to belong to something, to be accepted and they will use drugs and money to lure them in.

### ***Solution:***

- The MCJPD needs to continue training its Officers on the local gangs in the area, learn interviewing techniques and continue working with local law enforcement in identifying gang members. We, as in Juvenile Probation, Adult Probation, Adult Parole, city and county law enforcement agencies need to work as a team to share the information we all have regarding the gangs to help deal with them and to keep us safe out in the field.

# Juvenile Issues —

Listed in priority order

## ***Solution (continued):***

- Juvenile Probation Officers will need to continue working and supporting these families by increasing surveillance in regards to going out to their homes and schools. Probation officers need to maintain weekly contacts with the family and juvenile. Encourage parents to hold their children accountable to probation rules and become involved with the schools their children attend.
- Educating the parents on the signs of gang involvement and referring them to programs in our Department or community to help improve on their parenting skills, offer support, and to provide backup for holding their children accountable.
- The city of Conroe hosts several events yearly and some monthly that are at no cost to the public and encourage parents to make an effort to join their kids at these events. This could make a difference in the juvenile's behavior, by getting them to put their phones down and participate as a family. This may help them feel more loved and important at home rather than having gangs brainwash them into believing that joining a gang will get them a family.
- Another solution could be setting up a mentoring program for these juveniles or any other juvenile involved with the MCJPD who need a positive influential person in their life. Our focus needs to be on getting the juvenile back in their home with their family instead of being exploited by the gangs.

-The above information was obtained from Montgomery County Juvenile Probation Department, Tx Gang, and Attorney General's Office

## ***Identified Problem      Data Collection***

### **Lack of After-School Programs for At-Risk Youth**

Unsupervised youth are a major factor in juvenile crime. According to crime statistics, juvenile crime rates are highest between the hours of 3:00pm and 6:00pm, after school and before parents get home from work. After school programs have been found to be fairly effective in reducing the risk of criminal and delinquent behavior. However, this poses as a major problem for Montgomery County, due to the fact that there are only 2 after school programs that can help contribute to reducing criminal and delinquent behavior.

**YMCA** - Local YMCAs offer after school programs for children in kindergarten through sixth grade. The programs operate throughout Montgomery County and either bus the children to the facility from their school or conduct the program at the school directly. For those that do not qualify for financial assistance the cost is \$140-\$315 a month depending on the location and membership (Conroe, The Woodlands, Magnolia, Splendor, and Spring). The after school programs focus on children who are age 5-12 with there being only one location that has a teen center, which is solely for those kids who attend Lynn Lucas Middle School. At this point in time there is not a YMCA program in the county that has an after school program for junior high or high school age children.

# Juvenile Issues —

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

<p>Lack of After-School Programs for At-Risk Youth (continued)</p>	<p><b>City of Conroe After School Recreation Program</b> - Recreational after school programs are provided at area elementary schools in Conroe ISD and at the Oscar Johnson Community Center for children in kindergarten through sixth grade. Days of operation are Monday-Friday until 6:30pm when school is in session. The cost is \$90/month for residents and \$113/month for non-residents. Financial assistance is available for those who qualify.</p> <p><b>The Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program</b> - is a program for students ages 10-18 in Montgomery County who have been expelled from public school for committing various offenses on campus, violent offenses on or off campus, or are court ordered through the Montgomery County Juvenile Court. While these students are able to continue their education in their core courses, there are no extracurricular activities offered for these students to pursue their talents and/or career preparation courses. These students are often at a higher risk of committing an offense after 3pm and before 6pm.</p>
<p><b>Solution:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More after school programs are needed throughout Montgomery County, unsupervised youth are at a higher risk of being referred for a criminal charge than those that have proper supervision and programming. Financial resources are needed for families who cannot afford the cost of existing programs. Since no programs were identified for youth in seventh through twelfth grade, programs need to be developed for this population. Another approach that may be feasible would be to increase the budget for public schools and use the extra funding to create after school programs within the school that include preparation for adult living and/or job skills. This would not only reduce crime, but would also prepare youth better to enter the adult world</li><li>• In addition, the children at JJAEP are already at a higher risk for offending and would benefit from increased supervision after school. There is a need to offer after school programs that will benefit the student in providing them with preparation for adult living and job skills. With proper funding, JJAEP in partnership with the YMCA would be able to provide an after school program for their students. This program would aid in reducing crime in the community and assist in the rehabilitation of those kids who have been expelled. After school programs and career preparation courses provided after the academic day would not only assist these young people in enhancing their career opportunities, but would also shed light on hidden interests that some students did not know they possessed</li></ul>	

# Juvenile Issues —

Listed in priority order

## ***Identified Problem Data Collection***

### **Transportation**

Mass/public transportation remains nonexistent despite Montgomery County being named one of the fastest growing counties in the country. The most recent estimate from the US. Census bureau indicates the population to be approximately 556,203 which is 22% population change since 2010. The county is spread out over 1,041 square miles. The lack of mass/public transportation negatively impacts access to available services in which so many need, particularly those located in the eastern and western portions of the county.

The Department of State Health Services provides medical transportation to Children with Special Health Care Needs (CSHCN). Those youth who meet the qualifications can acquire a ride for medical service appointments. The service is limited and restrictions apply.

Limited public transportation is currently a Demand and Response service that began in June 2008. This shared ride curb-to-curb transportation service covers Montgomery County. Service is available by appointment only Monday through Friday from 5 a.m. to 7 p.m. Appointments for next day service are taken until 4:00 p.m. All appointments are taken on a space available basis. Buses are wheelchair accessible. Fares: \$10.00 for round trip (cash or ticket); \$200 per book of 20 two-way tickets.

A fixed route bus system is available for the immediate Conroe area. The route runs north and south along Frazier Street and branches out to the Dugan area, Lone Star Family Health Clinic and Walmart. Buses will run hourly from 7 am to 7 pm and adult fares are \$1.00. There is also a half fare transit card that can be purchased for those who qualify. Students who are from the age 13 to 18, seniors 65 and older, any Medicare card holders and military veterans qualify for the half fare. This will help some in terms of transportation, but the route is very limited in time and coverage.

### ***Solution:***

- One response to the transit problem is the investment into a new park and ride facility. This new facility will be located at IH 45 and FM 2854 and will provide weekday services 6 times a day. Construction has been completed and the commuter services are estimated to begin in January 2018. This will help provide transportation to the Downtown, Midtown, and Medical Center
- Public transportation is definitely part of the solution to the transportation issues with youth and family who require services to resolve problems. Although the current limited public transportation helps with needs, it is not practical for regular transportation needs such as rides to work or school nor is it available for services that extend past 7pm



# Juvenile Issues —

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

<p>Need for Updated Camera System in Detention and JJAEP for Enhance Safety and Security</p>	<p>Montgomery County Juvenile Detention Center is an 85 bed maximum security facility which is currently staffed to detain up to 48 juveniles. The detention center is capable of housing emergency evacuees from coastal detention centers on an as needed basis. In September 2008, there were 41 detainees from Montgomery County and 43 detainees from three (3) neighboring counties that occupied the detention facility for a week after Hurricane Ike. The camera system was, and still is, vital in ensuring safety and security and assisting staff in monitoring the movement of residents within the facility. The area involved and clients served are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Detention Sq. Ft. Total = 55,200</li><li>• W/parking lot (8100 sq. ft.) = 63,300</li></ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Detention Population:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>2012:</b> 836 juveniles detained</li><li>• <b>2013:</b> 765 juveniles detained</li><li>• <b>2014:</b> 798 juveniles detained</li><li>• <b>2015:</b> 818 juveniles detained</li><li>• <b>2016:</b> 755 juveniles detained</li></ul> <p>Currently the Montgomery County Juvenile Probation Department (MCJPD) utilizes a CCTV video surveillance system (NetVu Observer) that displays a very low quality video (66 TVL / 720P). The low quality video problem is a major safety and security concern that needs immediate attention and improvement. Control room staff are assigned to actively watch the live video feed 24/7, and with the poor video resolution on the already small monitors, it is extremely difficult for staff to accurately witness and report potential dangerous situations. Having an immediate response to potential dangerous situations is vital in ensuring the safety and security of all involved with the MCJPD. The video monitoring system is also used daily by management to review incidents for investigations, staff development, and accountability. The size video monitors being used at MCJPD are 22 inch monitors, and the multiple camera views reduce the individual viewing size to a few inches (monitors displays 16 different images). This small diameter monitor impairs Officer's ability to witness what is going on in the building in real time.</p>
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# Juvenile Issues —

Listed in priority order

## ***Identified Problem Data Collection***

**Need for Updated Camera System in Detention and JJAEP for Enhance Safety and Security (continued)**

The department is in need of more cameras to eliminate current blind spots in the building. Currently the department has ONLY 90 cameras in operation and over 118,500 sq. feet to cover! The lack of adequate video coverage creates a major problem with ensuring the safety and security of all involved with the department. In June, 2016, the detention center was audited by a Department of Justice (DOJ) Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) auditor and several blind spots were addressed. Due to the substantial price of adding cameras, the department was unable to solve this major safety concern.

Currently MCJPD utilizes the following number of cameras:

- 45 in Detention
- 6 in Casework
- 4 covering the outside grounds
- 30 at JJAEP
- 5 in the Annex area

The safety and security of all involved with detention is the most important aspect of detention, and an efficient, high quality video monitoring system will ensure the maximum safety and security is achieved.

The Montgomery County J.J.A.E.P. is a facility which is currently staffed to educate up to 120 juveniles at any given time. The camera system is vital in ensuring safety and security and assisting staff to monitor juveniles and their behavior. It is also used if a child grieves a decision made by staff or denies/ falsifies information regarding behavior. The system has also been used in court proceedings where a student has committed an offense against a staff member. The JJAEP has 8 classrooms and 17 offices for staff.

### **JJAEP Population:**

- **2012-2013:** 162 students enrolled in the program
- **2013-2014:** 204 students enrolled in the program
- **2014-2015:** 186 students enrolled in the program
- **2015-2016:** 177 students enrolled in the program
- **2016-2017:** 145 students enrolled in the program

The current video monitoring system at the MCJPD JJAEP has the same problems as the detention camera system. The video quality is inadequate, there are not enough cameras installed to cover the large area, and the size monitors cause for a difficult viewing area.

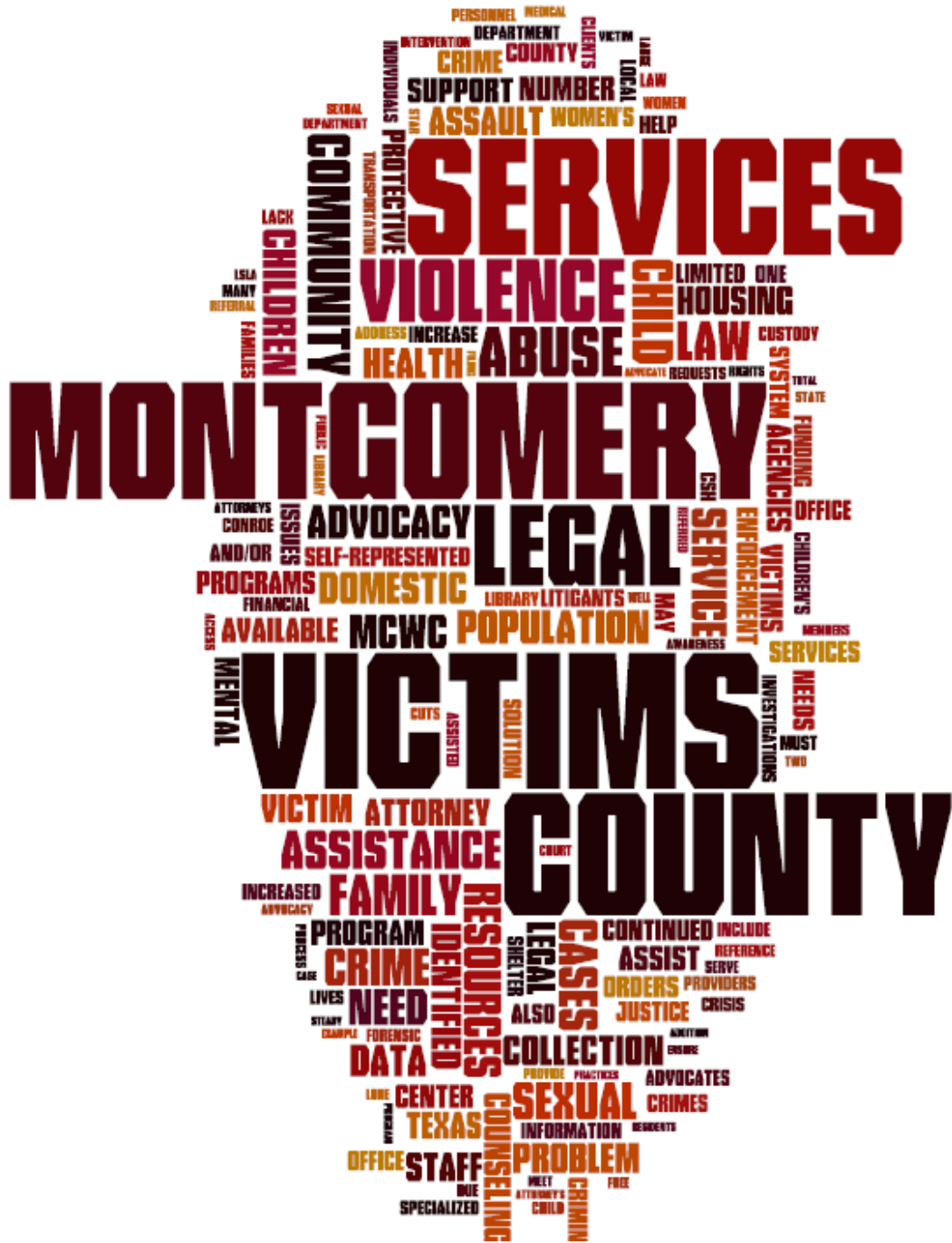
# Juvenile Issues —

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem    Data Collection*

<b>Need for Updated Camera System in Detention and JJAEP for Enhance Safety and Security (continued)</b>	Upgrading the entire CCTV system would dramatically enhance the ability of the agency to ensure the safety and security of all involved with the department. A clearer picture would assist management with properly reviewing incidents that occur daily, such as contraband being brought into the building, verbal & physical altercations, and accountability issues involving staff and/or students, and illegal activities.
<b><i>Solution:</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Juvenile Detention Center and JJAEP are requesting appropriate funding to upgrade and replace the department’s inadequate CCTV video monitoring system</li><li>-The following surveillance equipment &amp; software are in need of replacement and upgrade:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Monitors (40” or larger)</li><li>• DVR’s (more storage and improved video quality)</li><li>• Cameras (at least 45 more cameras)</li><li>• Surveillance software (upgrade from current)</li></ul></li></ul>	

# Victims Issues



# Victims issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem      Data Collection*

<i>Identified Problem</i>	<i>Data Collection</i>
Sexual Assault	<p>According to an article dated April 5, 2017 (updated April 6, 2017) in the Huffington Post entitled “30 Alarming Statistics That Show The Reality of Sexual Violence in America”, every 98 seconds someone in the U.S. is sexually assaulted. That means every single day more than 570 people experience sexual violence in this country. Sexual violence permeates our culture, from violent rape scenes on hit shows to sexist dress codes that reinforce rape culture – from famous athletes telling young girls they’re “supposed to be silent,” to near daily stories of sexual assaults on college campuses – from a former Olympic doctor accused of sexually abusing more than 100 women, to a President of The United States who has been publicly accused of sexually assaulting more than 15 women and was recorded boasting about it. All of these examples create a culture that reinforces the normalization of sexual violence.</p> <p>Sexual violence (i.e., sexual harassment, assault, and rape) touches the lives of thousands of victims every day and it is not going away. Consider these facts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Almost 18 million women have been the victims of rape since 1998. The estimated number of men who have experienced an attempted or complete rape since 1998 is almost 2.8 million. The average number of victims of rape and sexual assault per year in the United States is 321,500.</li><li>• The age range in which people are most likely to be sexually assaulted is 12 to 34, and seven in ten rapes are committed by someone the victim knows.</li><li>• A person with a disability is twice as likely to be a victim of sexual assault or rape than a person without a disability.</li><li>• 99% of perpetrators of sexual violence will walk free.</li><li>• Almost 19,000 military service members experienced unwanted sexual contact in 2014, with one in 7 of them experiencing an assault at the hands of someone in their chain of command.</li><li>• The estimated lifetime income that a survivor of sexual violence who was abused as an adolescent loses is \$241,600.</li><li>• 6.3 million adult Texans – 1/3 of Texans – have experienced rape or sexual abuse in their lifetimes. That’s 2 in 5 women and 1 in 5 men.</li></ul>

# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## Identified Problem Data Collection

### Sexual Assault (continued)

- 413,000 adult Texans were sexually assaulted in 2016, with most assaults occurring in residences and homes.
- Only about 9% of sexual assaults are reported to police.

When compared to 2015, the incidence of rape in 2016 increased by 4.9% nationally (<https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s./2016/crime-in-the-u.s.-2016/tables/table-7>) and decreased by 1.5% in Texas [Texas Department of Public Safety - 2016 Crime in Texas]. Looking more closely at the extent of the problem in Texas, the Institute on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault at the University of Texas at Austin reports that more than 400,000 Texans are sexually assaulted every year, and nearly 91% of the assaults go unreported to police. While not equally distributed in Texas, sexual assault impacts all genders, all age groups, races, education levels, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. [Sexual Assault Prevalence in Texas. April 2015]. Texas data indicate that most sexual assault victims were non-family members (54.9%), while 45.1% of victims were related to the offender.

Of victims whose gender was known, 13% were male and 87% were female. The age group with the highest number of victims was the 15 to 19 year old bracket followed closely by 15-to-19 year olds. When the victims' ethnicity was known, 40.5% were Hispanic and 59.5% were not. Where race was known, 79.5% were white, 19.4% were black, and 1.1% were American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. An examination of offenders by face finds that 87.5% of White victims were female; 84.9% of Black victims were female; 100% of American Indian or Alaskan Native victims were female; and 90.5% of Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander victims were female. [2016 Crime in Texas. [Sexual Assault Chapter 7 (pages 51-53)].

Montgomery County crime reporting agencies include 13 of the 23 law enforcement agencies in Montgomery County. In 2016, there were 104 rape offenses with the most occurring in the unincorporated county, followed by the cities of Conroe and Willis. Only 12.5% of these rapes were cleared with an arrest, charges filed, or prosecution. [Ibid. Chapter 10b. Crime by Jurisdiction. 6-24-16. XLS Sheet 171]. The Montgomery County clearance rate is well above the national clearance rate of 28% [<https://www.statista.com/statistics/194213/crime-clearance-rate-by-type-in-the-us/>Statista: The statistics portal.]

Below are some recent headlines from the media:

- “Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades”, New York Times, 10-05-17
- “Two Life Sentences for Man who raped 13-Year-Old” , Hello Woodlands, 08-21-17

# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem    Data Collection*

<p>Sexual Assault (continued)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conroe horse-riding trainer accused of sexually assaulting child,” <a href="http://www.click2houston.com/author/sophiabeausoleil7-20-17">www.click2houston.com/author/sophiabeausoleil7-20-17</a></li><li>• “Kocian Arrested for Conroe Sexual Assault, Torture”, <a href="http://thegoldenhammer.net/kocian-arrested-for-conroe,sexual-assault-torture">http://thegoldenhammer.net/kocian-arrested-for-conroe,sexual-assault-torture</a></li><li>• Montgomery County Sheriff’s Office Investigating multiple Sexual Assaults at Apartment Complex, Montgomery County Police Reporter, 5-18-17</li></ul> <p>An epidemic of sexual violence exists on American Indian Reservations. Studies have consistently shown that American Indian women experience much higher levels of sexual violence than other women. This has become such a critical domestic issue that former Attorney General Loretta Lynch devoted her entire remarks in recognition of 2016 Domestic Violence Awareness Month to the topic. [DOJ AG delivers remarks for DVAM. <a href="https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-loretta-e-lynch-deliver-remarks-justice-department-event-recognition">https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-loretta-e-lynch-deliver-remarks-justice-department-event-recognition</a>].</p> <p>U.S. Department of Justice data indicates that Native American and Alaskan Native women are 2.5 times more likely to be sexually assaulted than women in the U.S. in general. In 2016, Montgomery County had the second highest number of American Indians or Alaska Native Indian residents in the 9-county Greater Houston Partnership. However, the Montgomery County Women’s Center (MCWC) provided services to only 11 survivors of American Indian or Alaska Native Indian heritage. While MCWC’s Outreach staff is sensitive to the multi-layered challenges and obstacles that survivors from Native American communities face, talks have begun concerning delivery of Native American cultural sensitivity training by this tribe to MCWC staff. MCWC will provide outreach education regarding domestic violence and sexual assault, as well as available agency services.</p> <p>Sexual violence is an epidemic. In the aftermath of a sexual assault, survivors can face extremely difficult and painful emotions and experiences. Every survivor responds to traumatic events in their own way. The effects of the trauma can be short-term or last long after the victimization. For survivors of sexual violence, accompaniment, advocacy and counseling are essential for healing from the trauma. Studies show that the sooner a survivor receives counseling, advocacy and other support services, the faster they recover. In 2016, the Montgomery County Women’s Center (“MCWC”) provided counseling to 1,240 survivors and their non-offending families. MCWC’s Sexual Assault Program responded to 354 requests for medical accompaniment during the forensic evidence assessment process (2016-2017 VOCA grant year).</p>
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# Victim Issues—

## Listed in priority order

<i>Identified Problem</i>	<i>Data Collection</i>
Sexual Assault (continued)	<p>Survivors are assisted with developing a personalized safety plan and provided information about their crime victim rights. Advocates are an indispensable resource for survivors wishing to file criminal charges against their offenders. They help interface with law enforcement, demystifying the process, and can help engage complainants in vital decision-making processes. Empowerment through validation, affirmation and encouragement allows survivors to find the strength inside themselves to reclaim their personal power. The Montgomery County Women’s Center Legal Program provides a variety of services to survivors of sexual violence. Survivors benefit from protective orders, divorces, child custody, child support, and assistance with Crime Victim’s Compensation Applications. In 2016, the Legal Program served 1,014 survivors.</p> <p>On October 7, 2016, former President Barack Obama signed into law the Sexual Assault Survivors’ Rights Act. This milestone legislation clarifies a survivor’s right to receive free services in the collection of sexual assault evidence, notification of testing results, warning before a rape kit is to be destroyed, and the right to have the kit preserved for the entire applicable statute of limitations. During the 84<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature, the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault partnered with survivors, advocates, and legislators to expand eligibility for forensic medical exam reimbursement to sexual assault survivors who have not reported to law enforcement. HB 1446 became law on June 18, 2015. Despite expanding some survivor rights, Article 56.021, Texas Code of Criminal Procedure, does not specifically address notification to sexual assault survivors of the destruction of their rape kit. This is a serious problem that re-victimizes a survivor who waits expectantly for the judicial process to work. The 85<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature increased access to evidence of a sex offense “rape kit.” HB 281 (effective September 1, 2017) established a statewide electronic tracking system for evidence of a sex offense “rape kit” and must be established by September 2019. HB 1729 establishes a grant funding program for testing evidence collected in relation to sexual assaults or other sex offenses and authorizing voluntary contributions.</p> <p>In 2013, Texas Senate Bill 1191 mandated all Texas hospitals to provide a forensic medical exam if requested by a survivor of sexual assault. In 2016, a study by the Police Foundation concluded that the law had little effect on actual practice and sexual assault survivors still had to seek a “designated” hospital to obtain a forensic medical exam. A “designated” hospital is one equipped to provide forensic medical exams, typically by a Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner (“SAFE”). If a sexual assault survivor arrives at a hospital without a SAFE, they may be encouraged to transfer to a designated hospital. Texas House Bill 3152, effective September 1, 2017, amended the Texas Health and Safety Code by eliminating references to facilities designated in the</p>

Sexual Assault  
(continued)

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# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem*

## *Data Collection*

Sexual Assault  
(continued)

community-wide plan as the primary health care facility in the community for treating sexual assault survivors, and also provided that the Department of State Health Services designate a health care facility as a “SAFE-ready facility”. For more than 14 years, the Memorial Hermann Health System has been committed to providing sexual assault forensic nursing services in Montgomery County. These forensic services have been available to adult survivors age 18 and older and pediatric survivors age 17 and younger. In April 2014, Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (“SANE”) were temporarily unavailable; however, the medical forensic assessments were always provided as mandated by Texas Senate Bill 1191. The Forensic Nursing Program at Memorial Hermann Healthcare Hospital System continues to provide uninterrupted pediatric forensic assessments at Children’s Safe Harbor for scheduled appointments. Forensic assessments for pediatrics on a 24/7 basis began to be provided by a pediatric Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner at Children’s Memorial Hermann The Medical Center. As a result, in order to ameliorate this impact, the Montgomery County Women’s Center expanded its advocacy service area to include Children’s Memorial Hermann The Medical Center. The goal was to ensure that pediatric survivors and their non-offending family members received consistent advocacy services.

In Fall 2015, the Montgomery County District Attorney’s Office requested a meeting with all Montgomery County hospitals, the Montgomery County Hospital District, Montgomery County law enforcement agencies and the Montgomery County Women’s Center regarding the lack of 24 hour forensic evidence collection in Montgomery County for both adult and pediatric survivors. At the first meeting, all Montgomery County hospitals were represented and agreed to have a conversation with their administrations regarding their commitment to sexual assault survivors. A second meeting was held in December 2015, at which time the only hospitals represented were Memorial Hermann Health System and the Montgomery County Hospital District. Law enforcement agencies and the Montgomery County Women’s Center were also present. At this time, the Memorial Hermann Health System was the only hospital who remained committed to forensic services for survivors of sexual assault in Montgomery County.

The Forensic Nursing Team at the Memorial Hermann Health System began an aggressive recruitment strategy in 2015 to recruit and train additional registered nurses to become Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE) to provide medical forensic assessments to survivors 18 years of age and older. Currently, the Memorial Hermann Forensic Nursing Team provides scheduled pediatric medical forensic assessments at Children’s Safe Harbor in Montgomery County two days each week.

# Victim Issues— Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

<b>Sexual Assault (continued)</b>	<p>Children’s Memorial Hermann Hospital at the Medical Center provides pediatric medical forensic assessments on a 24 hour basis for Montgomery County children. On September 8, 2016 at 7:00 p.m., SANE nurses at Memorial Hermann Hospital The Woodlands began providing 24 hour medical forensic assessments to adult survivors. Conroe Regional Hospital developed and implemented a sexual assault nurse examiners program in 2016; however, the program was discontinued in June 2017 due to the cost of the program and the difficulty in recruiting specialized nurses. Conroe Regional Hospital is currently transferring sexual assault survivors to Ben Taub The Medical Center. During the 2016-2017 VOCA grant year, the Montgomery County Women’s Center responded to 354 requests for both adult and pediatric medical accompaniment, 259 (or 73%) of whom were Montgomery County children. Of the 259 pediatric medical accompaniment calls, 127 were provided accompaniment at Children’s Memorial Hermann The Medical Center.</p> <p>There continues to be an ongoing gap in Montgomery County for both adult and pediatric medical forensic services for sexual assault survivors. The distance that families must travel from Montgomery County to the Medical Center adds an unnecessary layer of emotional stress, time commitment and financial expense. In addition, nursing staff often work within a large geographical service area and are commuting to different locations. The Montgomery County Women’s Center Sexual Assault Program staff must travel at times as much as 130 miles round trip to the Medical Center. The distance, traffic and time commitment is a strain on the agency’s resources.</p> <p>A commitment by a healthcare system to provide specialized adult and pediatric forensic nursing services to sexual assault survivors is significant. Recruiting and retaining competent skilled registered nurses is an ongoing issue. The required educational training as well as continuing education is a substantial financial burden.</p>
<p><b><i>Solution:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Sexual Assault.</b> Montgomery County needs 24/7 adult and pediatric forensic medical assessments performed in Montgomery County. Texas House Bill 3152 provides that a healthcare facility may be designated as a SAFE-Ready Facility. Community stakeholders (e.g., Community Hospitals, District Attorney’s Office, City and County officials, etc.) should make a financial commitment (e.g., recruitment, training, competency) toward designating a SAFE-Ready facility and approach Memorial Hermann Health System to be that SAFE-Ready Facility for providing 24 hour adult and pediatric medical forensic assessments in Montgomery County. Since 2003, the Memorial Hermann Health System has demonstrated continued stewardship through a long-standing commitment to survivors of sexual assault in the Montgomery County community.</li></ul>	

# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Solution:*

- **Rape Kits.** Rape kits send a message to survivors that they – and their cases – matter. It sends a message to perpetrators that they will be held accountable for their crimes. The benefits of collecting and testing rape kits are clear: they can identify an unknown assailant, link crimes together, identify serial offenders, affirm survivors’ account of the attack, discredit the suspect, and exonerate the innocent. Recognizing the benefits, law enforcement should collect evidence at every opportunity, analyze it within a reasonable time, and maintain the rape kit and results until the crime can no longer be advanced.
- **Outreach.** The growth in the incidence rate of sexual assault necessitates a renewal of efforts to inform the public and law enforcement, district attorneys, court officers, and policymakers of the seriousness of this crime. While it may be unrealistic to expect that sexual assault will be eliminated as a social problem, it is tenable to expect the incident rate to diminish. Victim services organizations need to form robust alliances to influence public policy while continuing to educate the public about sexual assault victimization.
- **Mental Health Issues.** A conundrum exists in the area of sexual victimization. That is, individuals with mental health issues are at greater risk of experiencing sexual violence, and those that experience sexual violence are at greater risk of having mental health issues. As a result, victim services organizations should build stronger relationships with mental health services providers, law enforcement, and the courts to prevent the needless incarceration of rape victims which occurred in Harris County last year.
- **Clearance Rates.** No other crime is handled more poorly by the criminal justice system than rape. Moreover, no other serious crime is more under-reported. As a result, the quality of crime statistics appears to be uneven at best: some cities and counties in Texas and across the country fail to report data, or reports filed are filled with errors. Some jurisdictions report clearance rates based upon differing reporting systems further confusing the issue. In many cases, clearance rates are credited to the year in which the sexual assault was cleared, not the year in which it was committed. Sexual assault cases can be solved. Appropriate techniques to solve sexual assault cases need to be identified, investigators need to be better trained, and the culture needs to be changed.
- **Develop an understanding of “consent”. The absence of “No” does not mean “Yes.”** Public awareness efforts should be directed to fully spread the ethos of consent in our community. Steps should be taken to educate our athletic teams about the culture of consent, to engage teenagers and young adults in anti-rape awareness activities, to review dating behaviors that challenge consent issues (e.g., intoxication), and to shift the discourse from victim to perpetrator. It becomes everyone’s responsibility to learn, practice, and teach affirmative consent. This includes the affirmation that consent is clear, knowing, and voluntary; it is active and not passive; and silence, in and of itself, cannot be interpreted as consent.
- **Understanding the Diversity of Victims.** No one asks to be raped, but vulnerable people are more likely to be targeted as potential victims. Sexual assault occurs to victims who are vulnerable, including the disabled and elderly; the homeless and other individuals “invisible” to mainstream society; sex trade workers and those individuals who have fallen victim to human trafficking; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, confused, supportive and intersexed individuals; and “native” Americans and immigrants. Sexual Assault Advocates must educate communities that victimization is an expansive issue affecting everyone.

# Victim Issues—

## Listed in priority order

***Identified Problem      Data Collection***

<p><b>Sexual Assault / Child Abuse and Neglect</b></p>	<p>According to the United States Census Bureau, there were an estimated 147,950 children living in Montgomery County as of July 2016, approximately 26.6% of the total population of 556,203. During the same period, the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) received 4,945 reports alleging child abuse and/or neglect; of these reports, 2,776 cases were investigated. As a result of these investigations, 605 cases of child abuse and/or neglect in Montgomery County were confirmed for 2016. Tragically, three of these cases were child abuse/neglect related fatalities. A multi-disciplinary team composed of DFPS case workers, law enforcement, prosecutors, and victim service agencies, worked together last year to identify and protect these child victims subject to one or more of the following: sexual abuse, physical abuse, witnessing abuse and violence, and drug endangerment situations.</p> <p>Children’s Safe Harbor (CSH) is the only accredited children’s advocacy center serving children and families in Montgomery County. CSH staff specializes in providing forensic interviews for child victims (ages 2 through 17) of sexual and/or severe physical abuse, children that have witnessed homicides and other crimes, and/or are at risk for abuse. In 2016, CSH served 1,169 clients, a 21% increase from 2015.</p> <p>In recent years, the numbers of child sexual abuse cases have increased due, in part, to the ease with which children can be exploited via the internet. This new avenue of access to our community’s children has only exacerbated an already overwhelming number of child abuse and child sexual abuse cases perpetrated by victims’ family, friends, and caregivers. Child sexual abuse investigation and prosecution is challenging work and requires investigators and prosecutors with specialized training who can navigate these sensitive and complex cases. Currently, Montgomery County has four specialized detectives from the Montgomery County Sheriff’s Office (3 of whom are co-located at the children’s advocacy center in Conroe and one who specializes in CPS reports), two juvenile investigators from the Conroe Police Department, two specialized prosecutors and one specialized investigator dedicated to handling these difficult cases. Despite the best efforts of these dedicated professionals, demand for these specialized services continues to outweigh supply.</p> <p>The identification of child victims and the prosecution of perpetrators is only the beginning of a long road to recovery for the abused children in Montgomery County. The support needed by child victims requires professional assistance from a variety of fields working together to holistically address all the needs of the child. These needs can include basic human needs such as food and shelter, therapeutic and educational support, and mentorship among others. There are some resources currently available in Montgomery County to address some of these child victims’ needs but demand for these services continues to overwhelm providers. Adding to the shortage of resources is the lack of</p>
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# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem      Data Collection*

Sexual Assault /  
Child Abuse and  
Neglect (continued)

service provider coordination results in service gaps for these crime victims.

The BridgeWay Youth Shelter at Montgomery County Youth Services (“MCYS”) provides shelter services for homeless children ages 10-17 for a maximum of 90 days. Total capacity for the current shelter is 15 residents. MCYS is in the process of expanding capacity to 30 beds by adding a new shelter facility on its property; however, this project will not break ground until late 2018. Additional long-term (90 days to 2 years) residential facilities are needed in Montgomery County to address this need.

The Care Cottage is a residential treatment center located in Willis, Texas. The facility serves girls ages 6-17 who have mental health issues around abuse, neglect and/or abandonment. Their current occupancy level is 20 beds with a plan to expand to 48 beds in the future. Length of stay is six to nine months. Care Cottage residents attend schools in the Willis ISD.

The Gulf Coast Trade Center is a residential treatment center located in Waverly, Texas. They serve boys ages 15 to 17 who also suffer from mental health issues and have been victims of abuse, neglect and/or abandonment. Total occupancy is 150 beds, but they normally run at less than 100 beds per night. Their length of stay is seven to nine months. The residents attend school on campus at the Raven Charter School where they also learn a trade.

The Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County, Inc. (DRC-MC) offers free CPS mediation services (i.e., for all child abuse/neglect cases in which the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (TDFPS) is involved). During the last fiscal year (October 1, 2016 through September 30, 2017), the DRC-MC completed 90 CPS mediations. During mediation, trained DRC-MC mediators meet with TDFPS workers/supervisors, CASA volunteers/supervisors, attorneys for all of the parties and family members to work out a mutually agreeable plan that is in the best interest of the child(ren) involved. Studies of mediation of child abuse/neglect indicate that: (1) mediated cases are more likely to reach settlement without the necessity of trial and to reach permanency much quicker than cases which were not mediated; (2) relationships between the parties to the mediation are less strained; and (3) the parties are more likely to comply with agreements that they assisted in developing. Other benefits of mediation include “more open adoptions and increased family engagement in the decision-making process. (Child Protection Mediation in Texas: Past, Present, and Future, 2010 and Mediation in Child Protection Cases, Texas Center for the Judiciary 2016). With additional resources, DRC-MC could train more child abuse/neglect mediators for rural parts of Montgomery County where mediation services are sorely needed because parties typically do not have the

# Victim Issues— Listed in priority order

***Identified Problem      Data Collection***

<p><b>Sexual Assault / Child Abuse and Neglect (continued)</b></p>	<p>funds and/or transportation necessary to travel to the DRC-MC office in Conroe. The DRC-MC could also train more bilingual child abuse/neglect mediators for cases in primarily Spanish-speaking areas.</p> <p>Access Builds Children (“ABC”) offers unique services to meet complex community needs benefiting low-and moderate-income persons. ABC provides supervised visitation to families in special circumstances to encourage and nurture the relationship between the noncustodial parent and their child(ren). These circumstances include, but are not limited to, domestic abuse allegations/history, children exposed to domestic abuse, child abuse allegations/history, substance abuse allegations/history, lack of access/alienation of the children, lack of contact/reunification, parenting skills concerns, abduction risk, and diagnosed mental illness. In addition, ABC offers classes to educate parents about appropriate parenting skills, anger management, effects of domestic violence and child abuse, and parental alienating behaviors.</p> <p>In 2016-2017, ABC provided services to support almost 300 individuals, providing hours of nurturing child-parent interaction with the non-custodial parent. This service allows the children to love and be loved by both parents, while providing a “no contact” exchange process to focus on the safety of all parties so neither parent interacts in the presence of a child.</p> <p>Sexual and gendered minorities, especially the youth, are at an increased risk of victimization. Children under the age of 18 who report online harassment/bullying are twice as likely to abuse alcohol or drugs. Early childhood victimization is correlated with an increase in substance abuse later in life. In addition, children who identify as a sexual or gendered minority are at increased risk to become homeless. This at risk population tends to be between the ages of 15 to 18; is likely to identify as transgendered; relies on friends, acquaintances and other relatives for temporary shelter; moves around in a small geographic area; is unemployed; engages in survival sex for money, shelter, and food 3 to 6 times a month; three out of four of each sexual encounter is unsafe and children are putting their health and safety at risk. Children in these situations are oftentimes victims of sexual predators. Under Texas state law these homeless children are classified as victims of human sex trafficking (Nest, 2015).</p> <p>Exploring sexual and gendered youth minorities’ specific risk factors (i.e. stigma and discrimination) and the intersectionality of a lack of institutionalized protective factors, biased-based bullying, and a lack of family understanding perpetuates youth homelessness in Montgomery County. Studies show that without support of communities and schools, these adolescents are at increased risk. Youths that attend schools who have anti-bullying policies report a much lower rate of victimizations.</p>
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# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem      Data Collection*

Sexual Assault /  
Child Abuse and  
Neglect (continued)

Additionally, youths that live in communities that are supportive of sexual and gendered minorities, presence of gay-straight alliances (GSA), and have specific non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies have better outcomes throughout adolescence, enabling these youths to transition into adulthood more smoothly. Youths who experience biased-based victimization have a much higher rate of depression, suicidal ideations, suicide attempts, truancy, and substance abuse. Positive familial relationships are critical to positive outcomes.

### ***Solution:***

- Montgomery County needs 24/7 pediatric forensic medical assessments performed in Montgomery County. Texas House Bill 3152 provides that a healthcare facility may be designated as a SAFE-Ready Facility. Community stakeholders (e.g., Community Hospitals, District Attorney’s Office, City and County officials, etc.) should make a financial commitment (e.g., recruitment, training, competency) toward designating Memorial Hermann Health Care System as a SAFE-Ready Facility for providing 24 hour pediatric medical forensic assessments in Montgomery County. Since 2003, the Memorial Hermann Health System has demonstrated continued stewardship through a long-standing commitment to survivors of sexual assault in the Montgomery County community.
- Ensure holistic services are available to meet the increasing demand for crisis intervention, advocacy, counseling, and a variety of other support services for victims of child abuse and trauma.
- Ensure that long-term residential facilities and services are available to address the needs of child victims ages 8-18.
- Increase personnel for the specialized investigative and prosecution unit of crimes against children. Current personnel patterns cannot meet the increased need for services.
- With the increase in cellular phone and computer use in the investigation of child sexual abuse, additional law enforcement training and investigators specializing in internet crimes against children would streamline investigations and help facilitate collaborative criminal and civil outcomes.
- Ensure the child-parent relationship is fostered through collaboration, communication, and education in a non-violent, conflict-free environment through supervised visitation services.
- Increase resources for TDFPS mediations through the Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County, Inc. (DRC-MC) in all parts of Montgomery County, including rural areas where participants may not have transportation to the DRC-MC office in Conroe, Texas and/or where bilingual mediators are needed.
- Encourage entities involved in CPS cases to mediate child abuse/neglect cases as soon as possible after the case begins to encourage early family engagement in the process and decision making.

# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem      Data Collection*

Domestic Violence /  
Family Violence

*Still Playing: 12 NFL Players Have Domestic Violence Arrests.”*

Three years ago the above cable news headline shocked domestic violence advocates across the country. Our nation’s most popular sport football for both men and women, was not holding its players accountable. Second to alcohol related charges, domestic violence was the biggest off-the-field problem for the NFL. Little has changed since this report was aired: since then, twelve active players were arrested on domestic or sexual violence charges. Recent research of athletes in three different sports, established that the problem is pervasive throughout professional sports, and those charged are seldom convicted of domestic or sexual violence crimes. [<http://harvardjseel.com/2015/07/Bethany-withers-without-consequence/>]

In October 2016, the U.S. Department of Justice updated their definition of domestic violence. It is now defined as “a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner.” It includes a variety of complex and often interrelated domestic and familial relationships encompassing, but not limited to, physical and sexual partners, child and family abuse, and human trafficking. Unlike most other crimes, domestic violence is usually not a sudden, isolated, and unexpected incident. It may involve years of emotional and psychological trauma as well as physical injuries which may become increasingly more severe and occur frequently over time. Since 2009, the Justice Department has made ending this violence a top priority. This Victim Issues section includes discussion of all these forms of violence in Montgomery County.

The 2015 National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) includes the “dark figure of crime,” violence that goes unreported to law enforcement, as well as violent incidents that are reported. While the incidence of domestic violence (i.e., including intimate partner and family members) was nearly 1.1 million in 2015, it was unchanged from 2014. However, intimate partner violence (i.e., including current and former spouses, boyfriends, or girlfriends) took a shocking jump of 27% to 806,050. [<http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv15.pdf>]. The trend in domestic violence by intimate partners is clear, the reporting of these incidents to law enforcement has dropped by 5% during the five years beginning in 2010. While the NCVS and the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) are not entirely comparable, the UCR does establish that serious violent crimes increased 4% (i.e., of those reported to law enforcement). *Ibid.* It is safe to conclude that domestic violence, reported or not, perpetrated by intimate partners or family members, is a significant national and state problem. It affirms the conclusion of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Legislature where the guiding principal for the work of the Domestic Violence Task Force is to address “a preventable public health epidemic”.



# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## Identified Problem

## Data Collection

Domestic Violence /  
Family Violence  
(continued)

As reported by the Texas Department of Public Service, in 2016 there were 196,564 incidents of family violence, representing a 0.9% increase from 2015. Of the victims whose gender was known, 28% were male and 72% were female with the highest number of victims in the 25 to 29 age ranges. Thirty nine percent (39%) of the 2016 incidents involved violence between husbands and wives or common-law spouses. Overall, 97% of these incidents involved assault (i.e., aggravated assault, simple assault, and intimidation); 2.5% were sex offenses; and 0.5% were murder and non-negligent manslaughter. [2016 Crime in Texas]. In 2016, Montgomery County's thirteen law enforcement jurisdictions reported a total of 2,474 family violence incidents, 14.6% less than 2015. Montgomery County continues to rank among the top counties for population growth in the nation, and it can only be expected that family violence incidents will continue at or above their present levels. [<http://osd.texas.gov/Publications>]

This is the 12<sup>th</sup> year domestic violence programs have participated in the National Network To End Domestic Violence's *Domestic Violence Counts*, the national one-day census of people served by domestic violence programs across the country. On September 14, 2016, there were 6,627 victims served by Texas domestic violence programs. This figure represents a 14% increase in the number of victims requesting services when compared to 2015. Ninety percent of the victims found refuge in emergency shelters and, overall, 57% requested some type of housing services.

The Texas Council on Family Violence ("TCFV") reported that 146 women were killed by a male intimate partner in 2016. Sixty-eight percent of the perpetrators used a firearm; 77% of the victims were killed in their homes, 40% had taken steps to leave their relationships, and over half of the total number of victims were in the 20-39 age range. There were five femicides in Montgomery County in 2016, all of whom were murdered by a firearm.

As a family violence center, the Montgomery County Women's Center (MCWC) provides a wide range of services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Services include a 24-hour hotline which is accessible to callers seven days a week. Translators are available to clients with limited English proficiency. Independent of the NDVH, MCWC received more than 33,000 hotline calls in 2016, more than a 100% increase from 2012. This increase is concerning due to the scarcity of shelter programs available to victims in Montgomery County. The MCWC emergency shelter can only house a small sector of victims (75 available beds) while offering free services to survivors and their families for up to 30 days. Although MCWC sheltered 1,487 duplicated survivors in 2016 a 27% increase from 2015), this failed to meet the need within our county. In the adjacent counties of Harris and Fort Bend and

# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem      Data Collection*

<p>Domestic Violence / Family Violence (continued)</p>	<p>including the City of Houston, a 2017 Point-in-Time Count established that as many as one in four of the homeless population is a victim of domestic violence. With a 30% increase in the homeless population in Montgomery County since 2013, this means that as many as 300 domestic violence victims may be without shelter.</p> <p>When crime victims experience a trauma, they suffer from physical, financial, and emotional distress. Early intervention for the emotional distress is a key ingredient to trauma-informed care and plays an essential role in reshaping the victim’s present attitude to one that is positive, hopeful, and future oriented. It is also typical for victims to experience secondary trauma that arises from the failure of a community to respond quickly or appropriately with supportive interventions in the aftermath of the crime. Hence, in the absence of a response, the initial incident builds to become a re-victimization which creates long-term stress reactions and a state of <i>victim turmoil</i>. The Montgomery County Women’s Center provides victims with OAG-certified advocates for hospital forensic exams 24/7; trained crisis hotline staff for victim assistance information, resources, and emergency shelter; immediate access to Counselor-Advocates in both residential and nonresidential settings; legal services; and community outreach to inform the public of current issues and resources for crime victims.</p> <p>Victims of domestic violence often feel isolated and alone, and at the same time they have a number of pressing long-term needs. After facing abuse and violence, often for years, survivors need compassion and support to heal emotional wounds and to rebuild their lives. In 2016, the Montgomery County Women’s Center (MCWC) provided counseling to 1,240 survivors. MCWC continues to provide Domestic Violence Discussion classes to the clients of the Montgomery County District Attorney’s Office who are considering dropping the charges against their abuser. Fourteen classes were held in 2016 with 91 attendees.</p> <p>There are over 1,000 domestic violence cases filed each year by the Montgomery County District Attorney’s Office. While the overall murder rate in Montgomery County is low, 75% of those murders involve perpetrators who previously have been involved in a domestic violence incident. According to Brett Ligon, Montgomery County District Attorney, most murders and murder/suicides in Montgomery County are related to domestic violence. The Montgomery County District Attorney’s Office and the Montgomery County Women’s Center (MCWC) entered into a collaborative partnership in September 2016 for a year-long pilot program entitled the Domestic Violence Collaboration for Outreach &amp; Advocacy Program (DV-COAP).</p>
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# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem*

## *Data Collection*

Domestic Violence /  
Family Violence  
(continued)

The focus of this DV-COAP is a timely interaction to break the cycle of domestic violence by guiding victims toward a safe and stable environment as well as the prosecution of the individual who commits the offense. MCWC has committed one of its Advocates to office at the District Attorney's Office 5 days a week for 20 hours. This Advocate reaches out to crime victims who have made a recent family violence 911 call and/or have had recent involvement with the police concerning a family violence incident. The Advocate reaches out to crime victims within 24 to 48 hours to provide crisis intervention, danger assessment and make referrals to supportive services through MCWC's advocacy, counseling and legal programs as well as emergency shelter. During the 13-month period from September 2016 through September 2017, the District Attorney's Office referred 566 crime victims to the Montgomery County Women's Center. The MCWC Advocate was able to connect with 242 of the 566 referred crime victims, or 43%. The Montgomery County Women's Center has seen both its counseling and legal service numbers increase significantly as a result of this new collaborative partnership.

Another complicating factor for victims of domestic violence is poverty. Not all victims live in poverty but many do: 1) the majority of people living in poverty are women; and 2) a consistently high percentage of women who participate in federal aid programs were abused and continue to be abused by their partners. One common cause of poverty is a downturn in the economy, creating the right circumstances for both domestic violence and poverty to increase. The intersection of poverty and domestic violence is an emerging issue in Montgomery County. The most recent report concerning the 11-county Greater Houston Partnership region underscores the weakness of the Houston area (including Montgomery County) economy throughout the region. Today, between 57,000 and 59,000 Montgomery County residents live in poverty. While Montgomery County has the lowest poverty rate in the area (10.3 vs. 17 and above for the 6 surrounding counties), victimization rates appear to be following the national trend that are significantly higher for individuals living in low-income households.

Within the last year an unsettling trend has emerged: the seemingly callous disregard for the domestic violence victim's rights by judicial authority. A 25-year old rape victim with longstanding mental health issues was jailed in Harris County for more than a month after she broke down on the witness stand and later refused to testify. The prosecutor, fearing she would not show up to testify, sought the approval of the judge for her incarceration which was granted. A Houston-area state senator described what happened to this rape victim as "distressing" and subsequently teamed up with the Harris County District Attorney and Sheriff to push for new legislation to protect witnesses from this type of re-victimization.

# Victim Issues—

## Listed in priority order

**Identified Problem    Data Collection**

<p>Domestic Violence / Family Violence (continued)</p>	<p>Domestic violence victims should be treated with dignity, respect and compassion while being sensitive to age, culture, ethnicity and sexual orientation, recognizing that victim safety is key.</p> <p>Intimate partner violence affects all genders, ages, income levels, and every race and cultural group. Although it is a chronically under-reported crime nationwide, recent survey analysis clearly establishes the growing epidemic of violence across the nation. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that in the United States 20 people per minute are victims of physical violence by an intimate partner. The Texas Council on Family Violence (TCFV) reports that there were 194,872 family violence incidents in Texas in 2016 and 158 women were killed (three of whom resided in Montgomery County). TCFV reported that there were 15,869 unmet requests for emergency shelter in 2016.</p> <p>According to a Crime Victims’ Institute (“CVI”) publication issued in March 2016 entitled <i>Intimate Partner Violence among Sexual Minority Populations</i>, “[a]n understanding of interpersonal violence within gender and sexual minority populations has been largely overlooked in the criminal justice system and among victim advocacy organizations in the United States, despite the substantial harm produced by violence in relationships....As a result, gender and sexual minorities have been reluctant to report intimate partner violence to police and have been less likely to seek and receive services than their heterosexual counterparts, highlighting an important shortcoming of the resources available to victims that can aid recovery.”</p> <p>An inclusive definition of sexual and gender minority populations includes gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, confused, supportive, and intersexed communities. Approximately 9 million adult Americans (or 3.8%) identify as a sexual or gendered minority. According to the CVI publication cited above, “[e]mpirical studies have demonstrated prevalence rates of interpersonal violence that are generally higher for homosexual men and women when compared to heterosexuals ... In particular, gender and sexual minorities have faced increased risk for verbal, physical and sexual IPV, in part, as a consequence of increased stress that perpetrators have experienced from external factors such as widespread discrimination, and from internalizing this discrimination....To be sure, batterers with abusive personalities have used violence as a stress-release mechanism in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships, but this has been especially salient among gender and sexual minorities. These individuals have been repeatedly exposed to bias, discrimination, and homophobia from the general public which places strain on an intimate relationship and enhances vulnerability to violence.”</p>
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# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem      Data Collection*

Domestic Violence /  
Family Violence  
(continued)

On October 18, 2016, the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (“NCAVP”) released its 2015 Report on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and HIV-Affected Intimate Partner Violence (the “2015 NCAVP Report”). As indicated in the 2015 NCAVP Report, “Three months into 2015, over 85 pieces of anti-LGBTQ legislation, including “religious freedom” laws and “bathroom bills,” were filed in 26 states, which greatly reduced LGBTQ protections. These bills often target the very resources—housing, employment and counseling—that LGBTQ survivors of intimate partner violence rely on when experiencing violence at the hands of an intimate partner. According to the Washington Times, in November 2015, “Houston voters overwhelmingly rejected a transgender-rights ordinance, while supporters of the so-called “bathroom bill” vowed to keep fighting Proposition 1” [the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance].

The 2015 NCAVP Report indicates that recent research shows that LGBTQ people experience similar, if not higher, rates of IPV compared to their cisgender or heterosexual counterparts. The 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) found that 44% of lesbian women, 61% of bisexual women, 26% of gay men, and 37% of bisexual men experience IPV at some point in their lives. Dank, Lachman, Zweigm and Yahner (2013) found that LGBT youth are more likely to experience all forms of relationship violence compared to heterosexual or cisgender youth. New research is also beginning to look at the intersections of both marginalized sexual identities and gender identities.

In November 2015, the National Domestic Violence Hotline (the “Hotline” or “NDVH”), in an attempt to bring more awareness to domestic violence and victim issues, released a new public service announcement. Their short video shows how a relationship can appear happy and healthy at first and then evolve over time to become unhealthy and even violent. Because of a new partnership with the NFL, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and others, the Hotline has more equipment to handle increasing call volumes. In 2016, the Hotline answered more than 17,000 calls from Texas. The Hotline reported that Texas ranked second for volume of hotline contacts. Of all Texas callers to the Hotline, 60% fall in the 25-45 age range and 65.5% report IPV. While statistics by county are not maintained, it is important to consider that the Houston metropolitan area accounts for 16% of all contacts.

Of the 100 family violence service providers in Texas, 69 Shelter Centers (i.e., emergency shelters) and 10 Nonresidential Centers are funded by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) Family Violence Program. Clearly, the number of domestic violence shelters is inadequate for the second most populous state and pales in comparison to Texas Animal Shelters. Crime victims face a host of formidable challenges, ranging from evictions and broken leases to physical disabilities and psychiatric disorders.

# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

<p>Domestic Violence / Family Violence (continued)</p>	<p>A recent point-in-time survey in one state estimates that 98% of shelter residents have income that fell under 185 % of the federal poverty guidelines while 50% of shelter residents had no income or TANF was their sole source of income. Minimum wage is not a livable wage. Fifty percent of the homeless women and children in this country are fleeing abusive homes. Some are left with broken leases, which affect their ability to find housing. According to the Montgomery County Community Development and Housing Consolidated Five Year Plan (Oct 2013 – September 2018), “[t]here is almost no transitional housing in Montgomery County. The development of more transitional housing and permanent housing could reduce the number of families which experience multiple episodes of homelessness.”</p> <p>In 2009, the Montgomery County Women’s Center expanded its services to include transitional housing. Reaching Pines offers rent on a sliding-fee scale and ongoing case management assistance to help victims rebuild their lives independent from their batterers. The Reaching Pines Case Manager/Financial Coach works to empower residents and assist them with financial literacy, career development, health &amp; wellness, goal setting and life skills classes. Individual and group counseling is also provided.</p> <p>While other housing programs exist in the county, they are often limited by the types of victims they can serve. For example, Family Promise of Montgomery County serves homeless families in Montgomery County by uniting faith communities in a cooperative effort to provide shelter, meals, and compassionate assistance, including advocacy for low-income housing and other services; however, they have a very limited capacity. Affordable housing in Montgomery County for victims and indigent individuals is very limited.</p> <p>The Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County, Inc. (“DRC-MC”) offers low cost or free mediation services to victims of domestic violence to assist them to resolve the myriad of legal issues that can arise from domestic violence situations. Recognizing how important mediations are to victims of domestic violence and the importance of specific training to address the issues arising in such cases, Senate Bill 539 was recently passed requiring an additional four (4) hours of domestic violence training for mediators involved in child custody cases. Unfortunately, the legislature offered very little guidance concerning the content of the newly required training and gave a very short window for compliance. Mediation centers across the state, including the DRC-MC, are working very hard to ensure that their mediators are in compliance with this domestic violence training requirement by January 1, 2018.</p> <p>In conclusion, the state of Texas, House Bill 2620, 83<sup>rd</sup> Legislature, created the Task Force on Domestic Violence. A guiding principal for the work of this Task Force is that “Domestic Violence is a preventable public health epidemic.</p>
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# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Solution:*

- **Standardized Domestic Violence Data-**Information and statistics on domestic violence are currently available on a local, county, regional, state and national basis. The statistics originate from recognized government agencies, advocacy groups, foundations, and published field-based research. The data from some agencies like the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reporting, the National Incident-Based Reporting System, and the National Crime Victimization Survey can be both conflicting and confusing. Further muddling in the field is the emphasis on best practices, evidenced-based practices, promising practices, and “local efforts designed to produce positive results”. Analyzing and learning from the myriad of reports, infographics, news articles, and social media postings has become challenging for most domestic violence programs battling declining funding, staff attrition, and increasing demands. Standardizing the collection and reporting of domestic data would itself be a best practice that could benefit programming for survivors.
- **Implement a Comprehensive and Collaborative Response Strategy-** Comprehensive and collaborative approaches to reducing domestic violence are more likely to succeed than piecemeal approaches. This approach should begin with an assessment of the current overall response to domestic violence; identification of survivors, service providers; and assessment of critical gaps in strategies, resources and response protocols. The goal would be to engage advocates, law enforcement, justice officials, health organizations, schools, treatment systems, and ancillary service providers (e.g., homeless coalitions, food banks, and housing advocates) to build and participate in a comprehensive plan with a strategic focus on domestic violence services.
- **Screening for Domestic Violence Victimization-** In spite of professional association recommendations, most physicians are reluctant to routinely screen for domestic violence. Domestic violence agencies should form alliances with hospitals and physicians to provide training to identify signs of victimization and appropriate referrals. On a more informal basis clergy, human resources personnel, EMTs, attorneys, coaches, and many others could also provide domestic violence information and referrals to service providers.
- **Re-victimization-** Strategies to assess the potential for re-victimization should be clearly identified and communicated to law enforcement, medical professionals, and court officials. These strategies should include a detailed abuse history, risk assessment, identification of failed legal interventions, and listing of offender threatening behaviors (e.g., harassment, vandalism, gun ownership). A concerted effort should be made to identify specific behaviors that victim service agencies unknowingly exhibit that re-victimizes the survivor and discourages future reporting.
- **Intensification of Community Outreach-** Education and awareness activities should be both remedial and preventative. Immediate (remedial) efforts should be directed toward the age group with the highest incidence, 20 to 29 year-olds. Prevention activities should be directed toward older elementary students through high school. Both approaches should be intensified in order to make an impact on this unremitting problem.
- **Use social media, information programming, written materials, and other tools-** This can reduce victims’ “fears” about calling police when a domestic violence incident occurs. Identify and publicly disseminate information regarding the protection domestic violence victims have under existing Texas law.

# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Solution (continued):*

- **Capacity-** Recognize that domestic violence shelters in Montgomery County will never have the capacity to serve all victims, but develop practical data to guide policy and programming on a county-wide basis.
- **Legislation-** Continue to advocate for state legislation that expands domestic violence victim rights and reduces access of perpetrators to lethal weapons upon conviction. The 85<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature worked this session to enhance victim's rights by protecting their confidentiality. HB 3649 / SB 1757 amends Family Code sec. 93.003 by providing that written and/or oral communication (i.e. advocacy, counseling, and/or assistance) between a qualified Domestic Violence advocate and a victim is confidential. A qualified domestic violence advocate is defined as staff or volunteers who receive 20+ hours of domestic Violence-specific training. HB3649/SB 1757 was signed on May 20, 2017 and went into effect on September 1, 2017.
- **Best Practices-** Ensure evidence-based programs are the standard while expanding training of advocates and reducing administrative and reporting burdens by service providers.
- **Enhance Service Delivery for Same Sex Interpersonal Violence Survivors-** Expand the range and capacity of supportive services for sexual and/or gendered minorities. Law enforcement agencies and victim service providers should receive cultural sensitivity training to encourage appropriate response to same-sex victimization disclosure that can produce healing and promote prosocial outcomes. The range and capacity of residential and nonresidential services available to youth sexual and/or gendered minorities should also be expanded.
- **Affordable Housing-**Continue to advocate and support the availability of transitional and permanent affordable housing to alleviate the number of homeless victims and their families.
- **Legal Services-**Expand the range and capacity of legal services to address the complexities of domestic violence cases and encourage victims of domestic violence to utilize mediations to provide free or low cost resolution of the myriad of legal issues arising in domestic violence situations.
- **Continuity/Consistency of Training-**State-wide dispute resolution centers, private mediators who accept child custody cases, the judiciary and statewide family violence advocacy organizations should continue to work together to ensure that all mediators in child custody cases meet the domestic violence training requirements of Senate Bill 539.
- **Supervised Visitation-** Encourage the use of supervised visitation services as an option for fostering the parent-child relationship



# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

<p>Domestic Violence / Child Abuse and Neglect</p>	<p>When Governor Greg Abbott addressed the state legislature for his State of the State address in January 2017, he declared that an overhaul of the Department of Child Protective Services (“CPS”) would be his first priority. This call to action resulted in four major pieces of legislation that were signed into law on May 31, 2017 allocating \$509 million in funding for CPS and foster care providers. Of particular note was House Bill No. 5, which makes CPS a stand-alone agency reporting directly to the Governor. Child advocates across the state remain hopeful that these changes will create meaningful changes needed to fix an overburdened system.</p> <p>In Montgomery County, the number of reported cases of abuse and neglect are continuing to escalate at an alarming rate. According to the United States Census Bureau, there were 147,950 children living in Montgomery County in 2016. During the same period, the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) received 4,945 reports alleging child abuse and/or neglect; of these reports, 2,776 cases were investigated. As a result of these investigations, 605 cases of child abuse and/or neglect in Montgomery County were confirmed for 2016. Tragically, three of these cases were child abuse/neglect related fatalities. A multi-disciplinary team composed of DFPS case workers, law enforcement, prosecutors, and victim service agencies, worked together last year to identify and protect these child victims subject to one or more of the following: sexual abuse, physical abuse, witnessing abuse and violence, and drug endangerment situations.</p> <p>In recent years, the numbers of child sexual abuse cases have increased due, in part, to the ease with which children can be exploited via the internet. This new avenue of access to our community’s children has only exacerbated an already overwhelming number of child abuse and child sexual abuse cases perpetrated by victims’ family, friends, and caregivers. Child sexual abuse investigation and prosecution is challenging work and requires investigators and prosecutors with specialized training who can navigate these sensitive and complex cases. Currently, Montgomery County has four specialized detectives from the Montgomery County Sheriff’s Office (3 of whom are co-located at the children’s advocacy center in Conroe and one who specializes in CPS reports), two juvenile investigators from the Conroe Police Department, two specialized prosecutors and one specialized investigator dedicated to handling these difficult cases. Despite the best efforts of these dedicated professionals, demand for these specialized services continues to outweigh supply.</p> <p>Children’s Safe Harbor (“CSH”) is the only accredited children’s advocacy center serving children and families in Montgomery County. CSH staff specializes in providing forensic interviews for child victims (ages 2 through 17) of sexual and/or severe physical abuse, children</p>
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# Victim Issues—

## Listed in priority order

**Identified Problem      Data Collection**

<p>Domestic Violence / Child Abuse and Neglect (continued)</p>	<p>that have witnessed homicides and other crimes, and/or are at risk for abuse. In 2016, CSH served 1,169 clients, a 21% increase from 2015.</p> <p>In 2014, Montgomery County Youth Services (“MCYS”) in collaboration with Children’s Safe Harbor (“CSH”) activated an initiative funded by United Way to stop abuse, neglect and violence against children within Montgomery County by educating community leaders, youth care providers and parents on recognizing the signs of child abuse and assisting these youth through their crisis. MCYS also educated youth, adolescents and child care employees on prevention techniques to avoid violence and create a healthier and happier life. In 2016, 7,776 students participated in other prevention workshops related to avoiding becoming victims of child abuse and neglect and what to do if they find themselves in a potentially abusive situation. There were also 847 adults who participated in workshops to raise awareness of the signs of child abuse, neglect and assault.</p> <p>The identification of child victims and the prosecution of perpetrators is only the beginning of a long road to recovery for the abused children in Montgomery County. The support needed by child victims requires professional assistance from a variety of fields working together to holistically address all the needs of the child. These needs can include basic human needs such as food and shelter, therapeutic and educational support, and mentorship, among others. There are some resources currently available in Montgomery County to address some of these child victims’ needs but demand for these services continues to overwhelm providers. Adding to the shortage of resources is the lack of consistent collaboration among service providers. This lack of service provider coordination results in service gaps for the county’s most vulnerable victims.</p> <p><b>The BridgeWay Youth Shelter</b> at Montgomery County Youth Services (MCYS) provides shelter services for homeless children ages 10-17 for a maximum of 90 days. Total capacity for the current shelter is 15 residents. MCYS is in the process of expanding capacity to 30 beds by adding a new shelter facility on its property; however, this project will not break ground until late 2018. Additional long-term (90 days to 2 years) residential facilities are needed in Montgomery County to address this need.</p> <p><b>The Care Cottage</b> is a residential treatment center located in Willis, Texas. The facility serves girls ages 6-17 who have mental health issues around abuse, neglect and/or abandonment. Their current occupancy level is 20 beds with a plan to expand to 48 beds in the future. Length of stay is six to nine months. Care Cottage residents attend schools in the Willis ISD.</p>
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# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## Identified Problem Data Collection

Domestic Violence /  
Child Abuse and  
Neglect  
(continued)

**The Gulf Coast Trade Center** is a residential treatment center located in Waverly, Texas. They serve boys ages 15 to 17 who also suffer from mental health issues and have been victims of abuse, neglect and/or abandonment. Total occupancy is 150 beds, but they normally run at less than 100 beds per night. Their length of stay is seven to nine months. The residents attend school on campus at the Raven Charter School where they also learn a trade.

**The Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County, Inc.** (“DRC-MC”) offers free mediation services (i.e., for all child abuse/neglect cases in which Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (“TDFPS”) is involved. During the last fiscal year (October 1, 2016 through September 30, 2017), the DRC-MC completed 90 mediations. During mediation, trained DRC-MC mediators meet with TDFPS workers/supervisors, CASA volunteers/supervisors, attorneys for all of the parties and family members to work out a mutually agreeable plan that is in the best interest of the child(ren) involved. Studies of mediation of child abuse/neglect cases indicate that: (1) mediated cases are more likely to reach settlement without the necessity of trial and to reach permanency much quicker than cases which were not mediated; (2) relationships between the parties to the mediation are less strained; and (3) the parties are more likely to comply with agreements that they assisted in developing. Other benefits of mediation include “more open adoptions and increased family engagement in the decision-making process. (*Child Protection Mediation in Texas: Past, Present, and Future, 2010 and Mediation in Child Protection Cases, Texas Center for the Judiciary 2016*). With additional resources, DRC-MC could train more child abuse/neglect mediators for rural parts of Montgomery County where mediation services are sorely needed because parties typically do not have the funds and/or transportation necessary to travel to the DRC-MC office in Conroe. The DRC-MC could also train more bilingual child abuse/neglect mediators for cases in primarily Spanish-speaking areas.

**Access Builds Children (“ABC”)** offers unique services to meet complex community needs benefiting low-and moderate-income persons. ABC provides supervised visitation to families in special circumstances to encourage and nurture the relationship between the noncustodial parent and their child(ren). These circumstances include, but are not limited to, domestic abuse allegations/history, children exposed to domestic abuse, child abuse allegations/history, substance abuse allegations/history, lack of access/alienation of the children, lack of contact/reunification, parenting skills concerns, abduction risk, and diagnosed mental illness. In addition, ABC offers classes to educate parents about appropriate parenting skills, anger management, effects of domestic violence and child abuse, and parental alienating behaviors.

# Victim Issues— Listed in priority order

**Identified Problem      Data Collection**

<p>Domestic Violence / Child Abuse and Neglect (continued)</p>	<p>In addition, children who identify as a sexual or gendered minority are at an increased risk to become homeless. This at risk population tends to be between the ages of 15 to 18; is likely to identify as transgendered; relies on friends, acquaintances and relatives (other than parents) for temporary shelter; moves around in a small geographic area; is unemployed; engages in survival sex for money, shelter, and food 3 to 6 times a month; three out of four of each sexual encounter is unsafe and children are putting their health and safety at risk. Children in these situations are oftentimes victims of sexual predators. Under Texas state law these children who are homeless are classified as victims of human sex trafficking (Nest, 2015).</p> <p>Exploring sexual and gendered youth minorities’ specific risk factors (i.e. stigma and discrimination) and the intersectionality of a lack of institutionalized protective factors, biased-based bullying, and a lack of family understanding perpetuates youth homelessness in Montgomery County. Studies show that without support of communities and schools, these adolescents are at increased risk. Youths that attend schools who have anti-bullying policies report a much lower rate of victimizations. Additionally, youths that live in communities that are supportive of sexual and gendered minorities, presence of gay-straight alliances (GSA), and have specific non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies have better outcomes throughout adolescence, enabling these youths to transition into adulthood more smoothly. Youths who experience biased-based victimization have a much higher rate of depression, suicidal ideations, suicide attempts, truancy, and substance abuse. Positive familial relationships are critical to positive outcomes.</p>
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<p><b>Solution:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure at least one pediatric forensic nurse in Montgomery County is available at all times to care for child victims of child abuse and/or sexual abuse.</li> <li>• Ensure holistic services are available to meet the increasing demand for crisis intervention, advocacy, counseling, and a variety of other support services for victims of child abuse and trauma.</li> <li>• Ensure that long-term residential facilities and services are available to address the needs of child victims ages 8-18.</li> <li>• Increase personnel for the specialized investigative and prosecution unit of crimes against children. Current personnel patterns cannot meet the increased need for services.</li> <li>• With the increase in cellular phone and computer use in the investigation of child sexual abuse, additional law enforcement training and investigators specializing in internet crimes against children would streamline investigations and help facilitate collaborative criminal and civil outcomes.</li> </ul>
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# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## ***Solution (continued):***

- Ensure the child-parent relationship is fostered through collaboration, communication, and education in a non-violent, conflict-free environment through supervised visitation services.
- Increase resources for TDFPS mediations through the Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County, Inc. (DRC-MC) in all parts of Montgomery County, including rural areas where participants may not have transportation to the DRC-MC office in Conroe, Texas and/or where bilingual mediators are needed.
- The long term effects of abuse and neglect are many and are costly to a community. Thanks to the longitudinal research study done by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”) and Kaiser Permanente that tracked long term physical, emotional and social outcomes of children exposed to adverse experiences (“ACE”), we now know that there is a direct correlation between abuse/neglect in childhood and health risks as adults. For this reason, the collective efforts of all agencies in our community that are promoting evidence-based and trauma informed services should continue to be a priority.

## ***Identified Problem Data Collection***

### **Elder Abuse and Lack of Resources for Persons with Disabilities**

Victimization can happen to anyone at any time. There are, however, certain populations who are more vulnerable because of circumstances beyond their control. Two of these vulnerable groups are individuals in our community who are older adults (age 65 and older) and/or have disabilities. Individuals who are elderly and/or have a disability are at increased risk for victimization. This can take many forms - from physical abuse to financial abuse perpetrated by family members, healthcare providers and even strangers.

According to the 2016 Annual Report and Data Book produced by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), there are 424,643 adults over the age of 65 and 31,686 adults (ages 18-64) who have disabilities and live in Montgomery County. In 2016, Adult Protective Services (APS) received 16,524 reports of abuse in Region 6 (Montgomery and Greater Harris County) for residents who are elderly and/or disabled. This figure represents a roughly 9% increase from 2015. These intakes resulted in a total of 1,295 completed APS investigations – including 995 validated investigations. There are several governmental services offered to those who are living with a disability, including the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (“HHSC”) which oversees the operations of the health and human services system and provides administrative oversight of Texas health and human services programs. HHSC also provides direct administration of Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (“SNAP”) benefits (food stamps), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and various other assistance programs.

# Victim Issues— Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

<p>Elder Abuse and Lack of Resources for Persons with Disabilities (continued)</p>	<p>The Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services (“DADS”) provides long-term services and supports to a wide range of people, including a) people with physical disabilities; b) people living with intellectual and developmental disabilities and related conditions; and c) people age 60 and older. DADS regulates providers of long-term services and supports and administers the Texas guardianship program. The Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services provides services to Texans with disabilities and families with children who have developmental delays to improve the quality of their lives and to enable their full participation in society.</p> <p>Many residents who are elderly (age 65+) and/or have a disability rely on caregiver services in some capacity for their basic needs. Due to stressors associated with caregiving and high burnout rates, many times a person’s caregiver can become their abuser. The reliance on others makes persons who are elderly and/or have a disability particularly vulnerable to abuse due to lack of resources, physical or mental disabilities, isolation, and diminished sense of empowerment. Elder abuse and abuse of persons with disabilities are widely underreported due, in large part, to their dependence on others for basic survival.</p> <p>Senior adults are afraid of losing their providers or reporting family members to law enforcement and, as a result, they tolerate abusive situations. When victims do come forward for help, it is imperative that resources are sufficiently in place to afford them protection. Furthermore, it is essential that those agencies who offer support services to persons who are elderly and/or disabled in our community be properly trained to recognize and screen for the signs of physical, emotional and financial abuse.</p> <p>Montgomery County social service providers offer a variety of victim services to residents of all ages, including the elderly and/or disabled. For example, the Montgomery County Women’s Center provides services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, and the Texas Crime Victim Legal Assistance Network (TCVLAN) can be leveraged to identify further resources. In 2016, the Montgomery County Women’s Center provided services to 116 survivors living with disabilities and 71 survivors over the age of 60. However, a service gap exists to serve the myriad unique needs of victims who are elderly and/or disabled, especially those enduring financial abuse. The Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County, Inc. (“DRC-MC”) offers low cost or free mediations to assist elderly persons and/or persons with disabilities to resolve conflicts with family members, caretakers and service providers and prevent disagreements from elevating to violence or abuse/neglect. In accordance with federal and state disability laws, the DRC-MC provides reasonable accommodations and auxiliary aids (such as sign language interpreters) to ensure that persons with disabilities and/or who are elderly have equal access to mediation services at the DRC-MC.</p>
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# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

Elder Abuse and Lack of Resources for Persons with Disabilities (continued)

Prior to 2017, Montgomery County lacked training resources to educate service providers to help them learn how to recognize the signs of elder abuse. In 2017, the Montgomery County Women’s Center Outreach Manager met CHI St. Luke’s Hospital new Emergency Room Director at a CHI St. Luke’s Hospital Violence Prevention Coalition meeting. They discussed their desire for more education at local hospitals on domestic violence. One study indicated that a third of subjects reported having received no educational content on child, spouse, or elder abuse in their professional training programs. The “Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Fact Sheet” issued by the National Network to End Domestic Violence states that approximately 37% of women seeking injury-related treatment in hospital emergency rooms were there because of injuries inflicted by a current or former spouse/partner. According to *Futures Without Violence*, of the 44% of domestic violence survivors who spoke with someone about their abuse, 37% spoke specifically with their health care provider. They also noted that in 4 different studies of survivors of abuse, 70 to 81% of the patients studied reported that they would like their healthcare providers to ask them privately about intimate partner violence. According to the American College of Emergency Physicians, “nearly half (44%) of women murdered by their intimate partner had visited an emergency department within two years of the homicide.” According to the DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence, approximately 40-50% of female victims are physically injured when assaulted by their intimate partner. This percentage accounts for more than 200,000 visits to the hospital emergency room each year. Health care professionals are not thoroughly assessing patients for the presence of domestic violence. In addition, they do not feel they have the knowledge or skills to accurately assess, and do not understand the important role they play in identifying patients who are victims of domestic violence. As a result of the discussions with CHI St. Luke’s Hospital, the Montgomery County Women’s Center (“MCWC”) subsequently developed a Domestic Violence Training Program for healthcare professionals. Two trainings were held with the CHI St. Luke’s Hospital Emergency room staff in June and August 2017, and MCWC’s Outreach staff was asked to continue monthly trainings through January 2018 in order to train all ER Staff, Floor Staff and OB Staff. Beginning in 2018, quarterly trainings will be held to ensure that all new staff in these departments are trained. The MCWC Domestic Violence Training Program for healthcare professionals has also been offered to local colleges, and trainings are being scheduled for students in the physical therapy, public health, nursing and kinesiology fields.

# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

<p>Elder Abuse and Lack of Resources for Persons with Disabilities (continued)</p>	<p>Meals on Wheels Montgomery County currently provides a home delivered meal each week via volunteers to approximately 550 elderly persons who are homebound in our community. Volunteers are trained during orientation on reporting abuse to Meals on Wheels staff who then reports to the appropriate place, whether an emergency contact, non-emergency police dispatch, Adult Protective Services, or 9-1-1. This provides a safety check for vulnerable persons who are elderly; however, many seniors are left to manage alone. Many are in a precarious situation as they often fear that, by reporting abuse, they will lose what resources they currently have, or that they will be forced into long-term care against their will. Many elderly persons who are homebound are living alone and isolated, and do not have the knowledge, constitution, or confidence in the system in which they live to report a situation in which they live vulnerable and in fear.</p> <p>As indicated above, the number of Montgomery County residents who are elderly and/or disabled are on the rise. Without additional support services, these increasing populations will become more vulnerable and fall prey more easily to those perpetrators who rely on the isolation of their victims to facilitate their criminal activities. Experts have reported that knowledge about elder abuse lags as much as two decades behind the fields of child abuse and domestic violence. Elder abuse has gained increased national recognition particularly as the baby boom generation reaches retirement age. Elder abuse affects seniors across all socio economic groups, cultures and races.</p>
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<p><b><i>Solution:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Training focusing on culturally competent advocacy to persons who are 65 and older and those who live with disabilities</li><li>• Provide professionals who work in mental health and medical systems with training on identifying and responding to signs of elder abuse, domestic violence or sexual assault.</li><li>• Legal service providers and social service providers should collaborate to develop training modules focusing on screening for the signs of financial abuse of the elderly and residents with disabilities in Montgomery County.</li><li>• Collaboration among justice system and community partners to provide greater protection for older people and for persons with disabilities.</li><li>• Ensure that persons with disabilities and/or who are elderly are aware of elder mediation services available at the DRC-MC and that there is adequate funding so that the DRC-MC can provide necessary accommodations for these mediations.</li><li>• Collaboration in promoting “Know Your Rights” clinics for community members and those at risk for abuse.</li></ul>
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# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## ***Solution (continued):***

- \* In late September 2016, the Conroe Branch of Lone Star Legal Aid hired an Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps Elder Justice Fellow to address the legal needs of elder victims of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. This attorney will collaborate with existing community partners to offer training on signs of abuse, host “Know Your Rights” clinics for the community, and provide direct services to victims.

## ***Identified Problem Data Collection***

### **Need for Free of Low Cost Legal Services**

Access to legal services is vital to the overall health and wellness of any community. There is a greater need of access to legal services for those that are most vulnerable – low-income individuals and victims. Legal services to victims provide both safety and economic justice through appropriate legal representation in the judicial system.

There has been a marked increase in the need for free or low cost legal services in the community and, unfortunately, the services available to this growing population have not increased proportionally to the population increase. With funding cuts being a real issue for most agencies in the last few years, the number of staff attorneys in legal aid programs in Texas has dropped. As a result of this decline, many individuals, including victims, are faced with the daunting task of representing themselves in court. The Montgomery County District Clerk’s office processed 2,866 family law cases involving self-represented litigants from January to October 2017. The number of self-represented litigants, many of whom are victims, is on the rise.

According to the Texas Crime Report for 2016, Montgomery County had 8,816 reported crimes. Of the 8,816 reported crimes, 874 were violent crimes and the remaining crimes were property-related. There is a definite gap in the need for affordable legal services for low-income individuals and victims. Crime victims are subjected to physical, emotional, and economic injuries because of the crimes perpetrated against them, and any crime victim can have multiple legal needs arising out of one incident of victimization.

For example, women fleeing abusers often need help with protective orders, divorce, child custody and support, public benefits, property rights, and landlord discrimination. Human trafficking victims need legal help with immigration, representation in criminal proceedings against the trafficker, guardianship, wage claims, tax issues, protective orders, or child custody, among other issues. Moreover, many victims are subject to poly-victimization, which translates into potential legal needs specific to each type of victimization (for example, an older adult who is a victim of elder abuse or neglect plus identity theft). The complexities layer for victims in underserved groups, such as older adults, persons with disabilities, and LGBT communities.

# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

<p>Need for Free of Low Cost Legal Services (continued)</p>	<p>In 2013, self-represented litigants represented 36% of all family law cases. In 2014, they represented 40%. Of the 5,368 family law cases filed in Montgomery County in 2016, fifty seven percent (57%) involved self-represented litigants. Self-represented litigants represent 20% more cases than they did just three years earlier. These self-represented litigants generally require more time and attention from the court staff than cases filed by private attorneys. Montgomery County courts are inundated with individuals who need legal assistance but are unable to afford it or find free services. To compensate for the increase in self-represented litigants, Montgomery County hired two associate judges to assist with the caseload, yet the numbers of filings continue to rise. In addition, the County has now seen an increase in litigants with limited English proficiency. Unfortunately, there is no corresponding increase in court personnel who can serve as qualified interpreters.</p> <p>Low-income individuals and crime victims looking for legal assistance regularly face a patchwork system that requires them to approach multiple agencies to have their full legal needs met, and generally, there is no guarantee that a referral will result in services. While some collaboration exists between legal services providers, alternative dispute resolution (ADR) providers, social service agencies, victim service organizations, and/or other parties who serve crime victims, it is usually focused on resource availability, specific populations, type of provider, or some other specialized, specific arrangement.</p> <p>The limited resources for legal assistance to crime victims in Montgomery County include the Montgomery County Attorney’s Office, a reference attorney through the Montgomery County Law Library, Lone Star Legal Aid’s Conroe branch office (LSLA), Montgomery County Women’s Center (MCWC), the Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County, Inc. (DRC-MC) and volunteer work done through local bar associations. While these resources are available to the community, they have their limitations. In recent years, federal funding cuts and state funding instability have made it more difficult for these organizations to address the legal needs of self-represented individuals and crime victims.</p> <p><b><u>County Attorney’s Office:</u></b> The Montgomery County Attorney’s Office can assist qualified victims with filing protective orders. With increased population and limited resources, the County Attorney’s Office is unable on its own to serve every victim. For the period January through October 2016, the Montgomery County District Clerk reports that 98 applications were filed, 96% of which involved self-represented litigants.</p> <p><b><u>Montgomery County Law Library:</u></b> In 2016, the Montgomery County Law Library (“Law Library”) welcomed 29,808 visitors to the Law Library, many of whom met with the Reference Attorney for assistance with paperwork related to family law court proceedings in which the</p>
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# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

Need for Free of  
Low Cost Legal  
Services  
(continued)

parties were in agreement, and were self-represented. An additional 359 were assisted by the Reference Attorney at the uncontested docket. The Law Library received 10,371 phone calls in 2016, of which 3,873 were to the dedicated Pro Se Services phone lines. From January through October 2017, the Law Library welcomed 17,765 visitors, and the Reference Attorney met with self-represented litigants (“SRL”) involved in family law cases and assisted SRLs in 1,103 cases at uncontested docket. During that same period, the Reference Attorney assisted SRLs in 355 cases at uncontested docket. There were almost 6,200 phone calls in 2016, of which 2,317 were to the Pro Se Services direct lines.

While the Law Library provides legal information in many different areas of law – to SRLs, the lay public, attorneys, and county personnel – a high number of law library visitors have legal issues specifically related to family law matters. The limited amount of time available to the Reference Attorney necessitates restricting assistance to only SRLs with agreed family law matters.

All Law Library staff provide information, forms, and assistance about how to find attorneys, to patrons involved in contested family law matters, and cases involving domestic violence. Other common legal issues patrons face that do not qualify for the Pro Se Services Program involve landlord-tenant relations, neighbor law, occupational driver’s licenses, expunction and nondisclosure of criminal records, administration of decedent estates, property ownership and taxation, guardianships, nuisance abatement, local ordinances, building code questions, etc. In these cases, Law Library staff assists patrons with research, forms, and electronic resources.

A priority use of any grant money would be to add another attorney on a part-time basis to expand Pro Se Services to assist the courts with eviction cases, in addition to family law matters.

**Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County, Inc.:** The Dispute Resolution Center (“DRC-MC”) provides affordable, high quality dispute resolution services (such as mediation) and training in the Montgomery County area. From October 1, 2016 through September 30, 2017, the DRC-MC provided confidential mediation services to nearly 5,000 families, individuals and/or businesses. A large number of self-represented litigants sought mediation at the DRC-MC to address landlord/tenant issues, neighborhood disputes, property damage, family law matters (custody, divorce, visitation, child support, protective orders, etc.), commercial and consumer disputes, probate issues, disability-related issues, and Child Protective Services (CPS) cases. Significantly, no one is turned away from the DRC-MC due to an inability to pay and therefore, many of the mediations are done without charge to enable individuals earning below the poverty line to participate in mediation.

# Victim Issues— Listed in priority order

## Identified Problem Data Collection

<p>Need for Free of Low Cost Legal Services (continued)</p>	<p>The DRC-MC also offers domestic violence and crime victims a safe, confidential way to address their legal disputes if they cannot afford legal representation. A significant number of domestic violence and crime victims receive free mediation services from the DRC-MC in order to resolve their family law and related disputes. With a modest three-person staff and volunteer mediators, the DRC-MC continues to help Montgomery County residents quickly and amicably resolve disputes of all types. However, due to limited funding and resources, the DRC-MC has not been able to expand its alternative dispute resolution and training services quickly enough to keep pace with the needs of low-income individuals (including victims) in such a fast growing county. Due to lack of resources, the DRC-MC has been unable to expand its mediation and training services into rural areas of the county so that persons with limited transportation (who cannot travel to the county seat in Conroe, Texas) may also fully utilize DRC-MC mediation and training services.</p> <p>Research indicates that in appropriate cases, restorative justice mediations can be particularly helpful to make victims whole, make perpetrators more accountable to their victims and society and reduce recidivism in juveniles. (“The Effectiveness of Various Restorative Justice Interventions on Recidivism Among Juvenile Offender”, by Bouffard and Cooper; and Bergseth, available at <i>Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice</i>, 2016). The Tex. Civ. Practice &amp; Rem. Code §152.003 already allows for certain criminal cases, with approval of the state’s attorney and agreement of the victim and defendant, to be mediated, and the DRC-MC is agreeable to providing free or low cost restorative justice mediations for appropriate criminal cases.</p> <p><b><u>Montgomery County Women’s Center Legal Department:</u></b> The Montgomery County Women’s Center (“MCWC”) legal department primarily serves the community by representing victims in legal actions for protective orders, divorces, and child custody. In order to be eligible for services through MCWC, the individual must be a victim of family and/or sexual violence. MCWC’s legal department consists of one managing attorney, two staff attorneys, one legal assistant, and one advocate who works as a liaison between MCWC and the Montgomery County District Attorney’s Victim Assistance Division.</p> <p>The Montgomery County District Attorney’s Office and the Montgomery County Women’s Center (MCWC) entered into a collaborative partnership in September 2016 for a year-long pilot program entitled the Domestic Violence Collaboration for Outreach &amp; Advocacy Program (DV-COAP). The focus of this DV-COAP is a timely interaction to break the cycle of domestic violence by guiding victims toward a safe and stable environment as well as the prosecution of the individual who commits the offense. MCWC has committed one of its Advocates to office at the District Attorney’s Office 5 days a week for 20 hours.</p>
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# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

Need for Free of Low Cost Legal Services (continued)

This Advocate reaches out to crime victims who have made a recent family violence 911 call and/or have had recent involvement with the police concerning a family violence incident. The Advocate reaches out to crime victims within 24 to 48 hours to provide crisis intervention, danger assessment and make referrals to supportive services through MCWC's advocacy, counseling and legal programs as well as emergency shelter. The Montgomery County Women's Center has seen both its counseling and legal service numbers increase significantly as a result of this new collaborative partnership.

In 2016, the MCWC legal department received requests to assist over 1,014 victims of domestic abuse and sexual abuse, representing a 44% increase from 2014. The types of services requested were protective orders, divorces, and custody disputes. Due to limited resources, the legal department must prioritize cases and focus first on cases involving individuals facing immediate danger. A large number of victims seeking legal assistance do not receive direct representation due to the vast number of requests for free legal services. Without the necessary legal assistance, victims are left to attempt to navigate the legal system without representation for protective orders, divorces, and/or custody cases.

**Lone Star Legal Aid's Conroe Branch Office:** In April 2010, Lone Star Legal Aid (LSLA) recognized the legal need and growing population in Montgomery County and opened a branch office in Conroe, Texas. This office serves six counties – Montgomery, Polk, San Jacinto, Walker, Waller and Trinity – in a wide range of civil matters with only a Managing Attorney, one staff attorney, one paralegal and a secretary. LSLA received over 2,000 requests for legal assistance in Montgomery County – over 700 of these legal issues involved victims of a crime including family violence. Of these requests, sadly, Lone Star Legal Aid was only able to address about one-half of the total requests received due to its limited resources. While Lone Star Legal Aid offers a full range of civil legal assistance to victims of all types of crime, it has focused its limited resources and attention in helping victims of violence with contested divorces, custody disputes, and/or legal needs that are not covered by other agencies in the community. For example, LSLA has represented victims in enforcing Texas Property Code provisions which allow victims to end lease agreements with landlords because of domestic violence. LSLA has also assisted victims with identity theft issues, obtaining public benefits while they are trying to gain independence from their abusers, stopping abuse of people with disabilities, and enforcing property rights between domestic partners. There is one LSLA staff attorney for approximately 34,000 low-income people in the county. In 2017-2018, Lone Star Legal Aid's new Crime Victim Unit will continue to implement the Texas Crime Victim Legal Assistance Network ("Network") with the support of a grant from the Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime.

# Victim Issues—

## Listed in priority order

***Identified Problem    Data Collection***

Need for Free of Low Cost Legal Services (continued)	The goal of the Network is to create and sustain a comprehensive, coordinated, collaborative network of free wraparound legal services that holistically address the full range of crime victims’ legal needs in connection with their victimization. The Network will continue to expand direct referral relationships among the county’s legal services providers and offer victims a more user-friendly and efficient method of obtaining legal services necessary to facilitate their recovery.
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<p><b><i>Solution:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lone Star Legal Aid, the County Attorney’s Office, Montgomery County Women’s Center, the Montgomery County Law Library, the Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County, Inc., the Montgomery County Bar Association, and The Woodlands Bar Association can continue to improve collaborations to create a focused approach to a referral process and attempt to provide the variety of legal services required by victims and low-income individuals. Legal service attorneys can provide non-lawyer advocacy with other social service organizations to address the various other social service needs of legal clients.</li> <li>• Legal services providers can continue to collaborate to ensure there is not a duplication of services within our community and possibly collaborate with the judiciary in creating specialized dockets to facilitate self-represented litigation. Expanding the staff and services of the Law Library’s reference attorney and referrals for mediation at the DRC-MC can also help address the legal needs of the self-represented litigant. In addition, there can be collaboration between the County Attorney’s Office and District Attorney’s Office to facilitate protective orders in those assault cases already being handled by the District Attorney’s Office.</li> <li>• Legal services providers can educate self-represented litigants and victims through community clinics. Clinics can inform litigants of their rights and explain how to navigate the court system. The County can urge and support efforts by the local bar associations to create and grow a pool of pro bono attorneys to assist indigent clients through direct representation, providing general advice, volunteering as mediators, or by teaching individuals how to engage in self-representation.</li> <li>• Additional court-based staff interpreters would ease the burden on court personnel and other parties when working with self-represented litigants who have limited English proficiency</li> <li>• Increase victim education about the availability of protective orders and increase coordination of services between agencies for legal assistance related to protective orders.</li> <li>• The County and victim service providers can participate in the developing Texas Crime Victim Legal Assistance Network to ensure crime victims have access to free, wraparound, holistic legal services necessary to help them stabilize, recover, and rebuild their lives after victimization.</li> <li>• Expand the services of the DRC-MC to rural areas of Montgomery County to offer individuals who cannot afford legal representation or cannot find pro bono assistance in their area an alternative means to resolve their disputes through the development of legally binding mediation agreements.</li> </ul>
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# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem    Data Collection*

### Community Awareness and Prevention

Despite the best efforts of victim services programs across the country, there remains an urgent need for raising community awareness about domestic violence and sexual assault through conversations and education. Results from an Avon Foundation for Women study (September 2013) indicated that “the overwhelming majority of Americans have never discussed these hidden issues...and 65% of victims who come forward say no one helped.” The public’s astonishing silence on these issues undermines current goals for prevention and, even more remotely, elimination of these two social problems. Clearly, the message is not reaching or not being interpreted correctly by those to whom it has been directed.

While the incident of domestic violence is largely unchanged over the last two years, intimate partner violence is up. Despite the apparent discrepancy between these two figures, the volume of reported and (estimated) unreported cases is excessive for our highly developed country. These are distressing figures to consider\*:

- The health costs of domestic violence yearly - \$5.8 Billion
- Number of children who witness domestic violence annually – 6 Million+
- Percent of domestic crimes reported to police – 25%
- Number of American women assaulted by men each year 2,100,000
- Percent of those that abuse their partner who also physically or sexually abuse their children – 65%
- Percent of all women who sought care in hospital emergency rooms for violence-related injuries – 37%
- Family violence costs to the U.S. in medical expenses, police and court costs, shelters and foster care, sick leave, absenteeism, and non-productivity - \$7.5 billion annually
- Number of Americans who know a victim of domestic violence or sexual assault – 149 million
- Number of Americans who report they have been a victim of domestic violence – 54 million
- Number of Americans who report they have been a victim of sexual assault – 32 million

\*Sources: (a) Statistic Brain, 05-13-16. Sourced from DOJ data [<http://www.statisticbrain.com/domestic-violence-abuse-stats/>] and (b) See the signs: Speak Out. Avon Foundation [<https://www.avonfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/See-the-Signs-Speak-Out-Against-DV-Booklet.pdf>]

# Victim Issues— Listed in priority order

***Identified Problem    Data Collection***

<p>Community Awareness and Prevention (continued)</p>	<p>The Avon Foundation for Women is the world’s largest corporate-affiliated philanthropic organization that focuses on women’s issues and has had a significant private-sector influence on these issues. Numerous government agencies have also played an important role as well. Thirty years ago, Congress created the Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime (OVC). Their mission is to enhance the nation’s capacity to assist crime victims and provide leadership in changing attitudes, policies, and practices to promote justice and healing for all crime victims. While identifying significant progress in the victim services movement, the OVC concluded that “we need to enhance services to address ongoing needs and emerging challenges. Their Vision 21: Transforming Victim Services Initiative was the first extensive examination of the field in nearly 15 years. The Vision 21 recommendations, interpreted narrowly, for domestic violence and sexual assault programming are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic planning for domestic violence and sexual assault programming must be continuous and permanent, without cessation or interruption if it is to effect real change.</li> <li>• Evidence-based knowledge regarding domestic violence and sexual assault victimization, emerging trends, and services must be incorporated into service delivery systems.</li> <li>• Police and programming should be flexible to address both enduring and emerging issues in the field.</li> <li>• Technology, training, and innovation must be infused within domestic violence and sexual assault agencies to meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.</li> </ul> <p>An October 2013 research brief from the Crime Victims’ Institute identified domestic violence in Montgomery County as an ongoing issue. Very few families are able to desist, generationally, from domestic violence. Often the abuse gets passed down from one generation to another. Hence, the cycle of violence has not been interrupted and subsequent generations continue with this learned behavior. Reinforcing this is a research report published by the Criminal Justice Institute at Sam Houston State University. This report concludes that a crucial component for assisting survivors of family violence is the identification of available services as well as the barriers blocking delivery of these services. Hence, outreach and community awareness are essential in any efforts to break the cycle of violence.</p> <p>Every year, the Montgomery County District Attorney’s Office charges hundreds of individuals with misdemeanor and felony family violence assault. Drawing adults and young people into conversations about these criminal and behavioral issues can help prevent them from engaging in destructive behaviors. Raising awareness and participation in prevention programs help enumerate the tools needed to avoid risky behaviors leading to victimization or perpetration.</p>
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# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem    Data Collection*

Community Awareness and Prevention (continued)

Drawing further attention to this issue is the 84<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature’s HB 3327 which passed the Domestic Violence High Risk Teams Grant Program. This bill became law in May 2015. It provides grants for agencies who form a multi-disciplinary team to coordinate efforts which increase awareness of victim safety in at-risk families. The intent is to reduce domestic violence incidents and increase services to victims. Montgomery County shares in the national problem: the lack of awareness of the availability of resources by victims and their families. This legislation speaks to the importance of breaking the silence on the topics of domestic and sexual violence while stressing the importance of education and awareness with an emphasis on what bystanders can do to prevent violence and help victims before it is too late.

For the first time research has documented what many professionals have suspected for a long time: children who bully are four times more likely to physically abuse their intimate partners as adults.

Studies also show that children who have a workable plan on how to respond to bullying feel safer, more confident and are “less likely to be hurt by the mean behavior of their peers.” ([www.biggerthanbullies.com/index.cfm/parents-educators](http://www.biggerthanbullies.com/index.cfm/parents-educators)). With that in mind, since 2014 the Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County, Inc. (“DRC-MC”) has sponsored an Annual Conflict Resolution Day Bookmark Art Contest for Montgomery County students in grades K-8. This program promotes classroom and at-home discussions about constructive problem solving (such as peer mediation, respecting differences, listening, practicing tolerance, etc.) as alternatives to violence and bullying. Students then submit an original bookmark drawing which promotes their plan to combat bullying and these bookmarks are publically displayed in the Montgomery County Memorial Library and distributed throughout Montgomery County schools. In 2017, over 1,900 students from 44 Montgomery County public and private schools, as well as home schooled children in Montgomery County, participated in the DRC-MC’s contest. Over 15,000 of the prize winning bookmarks have been reproduced for distribution throughout the county. The Conflict Resolution Day Bookmark The Art Contest not only helps students develop constructive ways to address bullying and school conflicts, it also gives teachers and parents an opportunity to discuss this difficult topic with students in a meaningful and productive way. If more funding were available, the DRC-MC would be able to reach out to even more students across Montgomery County.

Educating young people about bullying is critical to preventing violence in adults as evidenced by a 2010 study by Harvard School of Public Health. Because bullying that occurs away from school grounds may be more severe, the goal of education and programming is to raise awareness within families, schools, and communities with anyone who has contact with children.

# Victim Issues—

## Listed in priority order

***Identified Problem    Data Collection***

<p>Community Awareness and Prevention (continued)</p>	<p>The Montgomery County Women’s Center (“MCWC”) has an Outreach Program which provides awareness and education to community and school groups about the issues of domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking and bullying. These outreach programs address violence in relationships at different ages and in different environments. Each year MCWC establishes goals and objectives for its programming about family and sexual violence, bullying prevention and intervention. Its outreach programming also includes awareness education within the community and promoting affiliations with partner organizations, law enforcement, district attorneys and court officials, hospitals and physicians, small and large businesses, and faith-based and other community organizations and schools. Implicit within the coordination of MCWC’s awareness and prevention activities is the belief that domestic violence, sexual assault, and bullying can be eliminated. Unfortunately, outreach efforts seldom have the personnel resources and funding to accomplish the task.</p> <p>MCWC also conducts presentations to community and governmental agencies, faith-based organizations, and businesses. The general public is targeted through resource booths at county, agency, or school fairs. All of these activities are designed to raise awareness with adult residents of Montgomery County about the serious nature and incidences of domestic violence and sexual assault, while providing information on community resources for victims. In 2016, the MCWC Outreach Department addressed 35,493 students and members of our community, a 23.5% increase from 2015.</p> <p>The Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County, Inc. (“DRC-MC”) also offers free informational sessions for the community to inform residents about alternative dispute resolution services provided by DRC-MC. Their staff and volunteers are available to speak at health fairs, church meetings, community group meetings, businesses and staff meetings/training sessions.</p> <p>The Montgomery County Sheriff’s Office (“MCSO”) has a yearly campaign urging local business owners to contribute financially, collaborating with MCSO to help continue the commitment to the safety of the community by providing hand-out materials for our children, adults, seniors and the community as a whole. Law enforcement is inherently reactive, but prevention is really important and that comes with proactive awareness through every possible avenue. These materials are made available through our schools, youth, neighborhoods and many other community events. A broad range of topics are addressed including bullying and violence prevention, internet safety, drug awareness, safety for seniors, neighborhood safety and many other concerns. The materials also provide a great tool in helping parents, teachers and communities in understanding the difficulties that our youth face each and every day. For instance, young victims of bullying can suffer long-term consequences that haunt them long into adulthood.</p>
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# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem    Data Collection*

<b>Community Awareness and Prevention (continued)</b>	For the perpetrators, bullying can cross the line and become a criminal violation with lifelong consequences. A recent study by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids showed that nearly 60 percent of boys who were classified as bullies in sixth to ninth grade went on to criminally victimize and face prosecution and conviction of at least one crime by the age of 24. Proactive policing involves law enforcement working with community groups so more citizens are informed of issues that should be remedied before a crime occurs. The goal is to bring awareness to the community, help prevent crimes from occurring and reduce the incidence of our citizens becoming victims, thus enhancing public safety and improving criminal justice.
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### ***Solution:***

- Continue education and awareness efforts that promote positive attitudes toward nonviolence while encouraging individuals to report domestic violence and sexual assault. Empower students to create constructive, non-violent ways to resolve disputes and develop a culture of kindness in all Montgomery County schools and encourage them to participate in the annual Conflict Resolution Day Bookmark Art Contest sponsored by the DRC-MC.
- Be clear about the message; Identify and reach out to allies; Reach out to law enforcement, prosecutors, policy makers, and educators.
- Recognize that new challenges call for new solutions.
- Assist all victims, even those not receiving assistance from existing state programs.
- Build capacity and infrastructure at the local level.
- Provide wraparound legal assistance designed to provide for a wider range of victims' needs.
- Recognize and target victim assistance support for violence occurring within the American Indian community.
- Transcend current victim assistance boundaries to establish larger goals.
- Identify barriers that block the acquisition of services by some victims (e.g., language, family, finances, culture, transportation).
- Create awareness of interagency collaboration and comprehensive victim advocacy by publicizing conviction data from Domestic Violence Courts.
- Publicize convictions for sexual violence offenders.
- Advocate for laws and judicial procedures at the local and state level that offer greater protection for domestic and/or sexual violence victims.
- Develop county-wide centers where batterers and their children may be supervised and include a safe place to exchange children for court-ordered overnight visitations.
- Educate health providers on the incidence of domestic violence and sexual assault and encourage them to establish a conversation with their patients as necessary.

# Victim Issues— Listed in priority order

***Solution (continued):***

- Advocate for the accessibility of services for all population groups, especially underserved and underrepresented groups.
- Develop a program to demystify domestic violence and sexual assault deceptions such as:
  - Victims have done something to provoke the attack.
  - Alcohol and drugs are the real cause of this violence.
  - Victims are at fault for not leaving the situation.

***Identified Problem    Data Collection***

<p><b>Advocacy for Victims</b></p>	<p>Crime Statistics tell only part of the story. They do not show the actual number of victims affected by crime, nor do they reflect the financial and emotional impact experienced by victims of both violent and nonviolent crimes. Crime victimization affects all aspects of one’s personal life. The impact is immediate, and the effects can last for years. Advocacy is vital to the stabilization, healing and rebuilding of victims’ lives and may be needed long after a case may or may not have completed its route through the criminal justice system.</p> <p>Advocacy for crime victims includes those services that are legally mandated to be provided by criminal justice based agencies. State law (Texas Code of Criminal Procedure, Chapter 56.04) requires the district attorney, criminal district attorney, or county attorney who prosecute criminal cases to designate a person to serve as a victim assistance coordinator in that jurisdiction. Each local law enforcement agency must designate one person to serve as the agency’s crime victim liaison. Their duties are to ensure that a victim, guardian of a victim, or close relative of a deceased victim is afforded their rights which include but are not limited to: information related to the criminal justice process; crime victims’ rights; the Texas Crime Victims’ Compensation Fund, certain notifications if requested by a victim; and contact information for law enforcement, prosecutor’s offices and sexual assault programs. Victim assistance coordinators and law enforcement liaisons are the primary contact for victims with their agency.</p> <p>The needs of crime victims, however, far exceed legal mandates. For justice to be served, assistance should also come from community advocacy programs which aid them in healing and rebuilding their lives. Advocacy is a collaboration between all parties and community based advocates representing independent, private and non-profit agencies that provide an array of comprehensive services such as; crisis intervention; shelter; counseling; medical services, legal services; transportation; emergency financial assistance, information and referral; grief support; justice advocacy; assistance with crime victim compensation; and other valuable assistance to empower victims.</p> <p>The Montgomery County Women’s Center (“MCWC”) currently provides a 24 hour crisis hotline, crisis intervention, advocacy, individual</p>
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# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem    Data Collection*

Advocacy for  
Victims  
(continued)

and group counseling, legal services, emergency shelter, transitional housing and community outreach. Medical accompaniment is provided on a 24/7 basis to victims of domestic and sexual violence. The Montgomery County Women’s Center is a certified OAG Sexual Assault Program. As required by OAG’s standards, the MCWC Sexual Assault Program must provide medical accompaniment on a 24 hour/7 day a week basis. As a result, a primary and back-up advocate must always be on call requiring staffing for 336 hours each week. This Program is staffed by a Sexual Assault Manager and 3 advocates and has a high employee turnover rate. In addition to the time commitment and on-call rotation, vicarious traumatization is also an issue. In 2016, the Montgomery County Women’s Center responded to 312 requests for medical accompaniment. Unfortunately, the need for services continues to grow and there is still a gap in service.

In 2016, the Montgomery County Women’s Center (MCWC) provided counseling services to 1,240 primary and secondary survivors. The Counseling Program is staffed by eight counselors, seven of whom are licensed and one is working on a PhD in Counseling. In addition, MCWC utilizes 6 counseling graduate students each year. MCWC offers counseling services in nonresidential and residential settings in The Woodlands and Conroe. There is a gap in the provision of services in both the eastern and western portions of Montgomery County where many victims either lack transportation or money for gas to travel outside their community. There are many occasions throughout the year where there are no available counseling appointments in the nonresidential setting and this is also a gap in service. Victims needing shelter must travel to Conroe and victims needing follow-up services must travel to either The Woodlands or Conroe for those services. Similarly, Children’s Safe Harbor (“CSH”) does not have enough advocate staff or volunteers to support the need for services for sexually abused and traumatized children and their non-offending family members. The complexity of the cases that are referred to CSH and the increased severity of child abuse and assault have currently maximized staffing patterns and exhausted resources. While there is great confidence in the multi-disciplinary team approach to child abuse investigations in Montgomery County, evidenced by the increasing referral rates, there continue to be insufficient fiscal resources to support the increased service needs.

The MCWC Legal Program provides representation to victims who are seeking protective orders. This Legal Program also assists in matters involving divorce and child custody. This Program serves over 1,000 primary and secondary victims annually. Domestic violence issues intersect with nearly every area of legal practice. Consequently, the MCWC and Lone Star Legal Aid network with allied professionals to help improve legal assistance to victims. However, the need for free legal assistance outpaces the resources in Montgomery County.

# Victim Issues—

## Listed in priority order

**Identified Problem    Data Collection**

<p>Advocacy for Victims (continued)</p>	<p>In cooperation with the Montgomery County District Attorney’s Office (“DA”), MCWC facilitates a Domestic Violence Discussion (DVD) course for victims requesting dismissal of family violence charges. The class is mandatory before the DA accepts an affidavit of non-prosecution. Participation does not guarantee a case will be dismissed but does empower the victim with knowledge about community resources. Victims are under tremendous pressure by their batterer, family members and defense attorneys to “drop charges.” This program was designed to inform victims of the dynamics of violent relationships and the dangers of staying in a domestic violence situation for themselves and especially their children. Family violence has lasting effects on both children and society. The DVD program provides alternatives to victims of domestic violence as well as access to services such as shelter, counseling, legal services and advocacy. DVD is available to both women and men in Montgomery County. Victim cooperation is essential to prosecute batterers and DVD provides the tools to making change in their lives. In 2016, fourteen classes were held with 66 participants.</p> <p>Training is essential for all victim services personnel and it should include best practices, current issues facing victims, updates on health and mental health issues, legislative updates and professional development. These are front line responders and their delivery and understanding of complex issues facing victims is limited without proper education and training. Advocates must be able to communicate effectively and guide victims through the criminal justice system in a sensitive and compassionate manner. All advocates must have a thorough understanding of: (1) the criminal justice system; (2) types of victimization; (3) cultural diversity protocols; (4) crisis intervention practices; and (5) available resources. The role of a victims’ advocate is not a substitution for law enforcement personnel or prosecutors but is an integral component in the justice process. Advocates will be challenged with addressing growing concerns of immigrant populations pertaining to any federal immigration policy changes under a new administration. Misinformation and fear typically destabilize networks of trust for communities when federal law changes. This impacts a victim’s sense of trust.</p> <p>As mentioned above, victims face a myriad of issues (legal, advocacy, counseling, language barriers, mental health concerns, and inadequate transportation) from their victimization.</p>
<p><b>Solution:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate information about county and community based advocacy programs on the existing Montgomery County web page. This could be achieved by the addition of a page specifically devoted to advocates serving crime victims in the community along with a description of the services they provide and contact information. Volunteer opportunities and donation requests could also be listed to supplement staffing shortages and funding limitations.</li> </ul>	

# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## ***Solution:***

- Ensure ongoing training for advocates regarding crisis intervention, trauma-informed care, cultural diversity, best practices of advocacy, and coping with vicarious traumatization.
- Increase the number of graduate counseling students and collaborate with other agencies who provide free counseling services.
- Continue to improve legal outreach through the new advocate position that acts as a liaison between MCWC and the Montgomery County District Attorney’s Office. This will ensure that victims receive expedited access to legal advice and other vital resources during the most vulnerable times of their crises.
- Increase awareness to both the general public as well as the applicable service providers regarding victim accompaniment offered for court and SANE exams.
- Advocates should stay abreast of pending changes related to immigration and other policies impacting crime victims in order to protect their rights.
- Refer appropriate cases to the DRC-MC for restorative justice mediations and make certain that victims are aware of the bilingual, elder law, CPS and other mediation programs available at the DRC-MC.

## ***Identified Problem Data Collection***

### **Emerging Trends in Victimization**

#### **Immigration**

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, 1948. This Declaration encompasses 30 articles that have been adapted for use throughout the world. In the first preamble, the Declaration states: “Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” Article 1 espouses the overarching principle that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

In keeping with this spirit, the United States has settled nearly 3 million refugees since 1980, more than any other country. During the last two decades, the United States has assisted an average of 6% of the world’s refugee population each year. Since 2013, this number has dropped according to a Pew Research Center Analysis of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and U.S. State Department data which indicates that the United States is on track this year to respond to just 2% of the world refugee populations from war torn regions.

# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem    Data Collection*

<p>Emerging Trends in Victimization (continued)</p>	<p>Gender-based violence stemming from conflict can be correlated to conflict across the world. Sexual violence and/or the threat of sexual violence are strategies used by militants in targeting “enemy” communities and creating an environment of fear. Ethnic differences, socioeconomic discrimination, and group or religious rivalries can increase these risks. As marginalized communities flee conflict zones, women and children remain at risk. Smugglers and human traffickers often target women and girls traveling alone by attempting to coerce persons with limited financial resources into exchanging sex for a seat on a boat. Nearly half of migrant women and children surveyed in Libya for a UNICEF (2017) study reported sexual violence and abuse at multiple times and/or locations while in transit. The UNICEF survey also found an increasing number of female refugees taking birth control shots to prevent pregnancy while traveling or while in refugee camps. These problems not only affect the Middle East and Africa, but many women and children share similar experiences when migrating to the U.S. from Central America. Extreme violence and poverty in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras motivates many people to migrate. Between 60 and 80% of female migrants traveling through Mexico are affected by sexual violence.</p> <p>Due to high levels of compound trauma, acculturation stress, limited English proficiency, and lack of economic resources, refugee and migrant populations are in need of community support and social services. Studies suggest that when they have access to and trust their new community, the likelihood of community participation increases. The National Latin Network (2017) attributes recent immigration enforcement policies to the apprehension by undocumented residents to report crimes to the police and/or request social services due to the fear of deportation. In addition, power and control is often utilized against undocumented immigrants by their intimate partners.</p> <p>Immigration has become a significant political issue in the last decade. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that there is a total of 4.5 million immigrants in the U.S., representing almost 17% of the U.S. population, a 7% increase from 1990. For this reason, immigration is an important national and local conversation and it is imperative that communities identify and understand the needs of this population. Although immigration from Latin America peaked in 2009, these immigrants encompass almost 70% of all immigrant populations in the United States today. A 2015 Pew Research Center study predicted that demographic changes are likely to occur in the next 50 years. They project that between 2015 and 2065, 88% of population growth will be attributed to immigration, 38% of which will be foreign-born immigrants compared to 1965 when immigrants made up only 5% of the population. Asian immigrants are projected to be the largest group by 2065, making up 38% of the population, with Hispanics projected to be 31%.</p>
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# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

### Emerging Trends in Victimization (continued)

An American Immigration Council 2015 Fact Sheet indicates that Latinos and Asian immigrants make up nearly 1 in 6 Texans. The Latino population in Texas has increased 13% and Asian population has increased by 2.5%. In Texas, 35% of Latino children live in poverty, whereas 11% of white non-Latino children live under the poverty line – 61% of Latino children under 18 in the U.S. come from families whose incomes are below 200% of the federal poverty line. A significant number of immigrants come to Texas without speaking English. Common languages spoken are Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin), Tagalog, Vietnamese, Korean, Hindi, Arabic and Urdu. The ability to understand various cultures is critical and is a challenge faced by many communities, including Montgomery County. There is a disproportionate number of Hispanic youth arrested and/or referred to Juvenile Probation in comparison to Caucasian youth. [2014 Children at Risk - United Way Greater Houston]. Nearly 30% of all low-income children in the U.S. are the children of immigrants.

Approximately 26% of Montgomery County Women’s Center (“MCWC”) clients are of Latino/a heritage. Since the beginning of 2016, MCWC’s nonresidential counseling program has provided counseling services to 89 Latino/a survivors, 80 of which were undocumented. In 2017, MCWC’s Emergency Shelter experienced a 20% decline in requests for services from Hispanic survivors. Abusers of immigrants, male and female, often use immigration-related threats to assert power and control over their spouse or intimate partner. The threat is nearly always the same: the victim’s immigration status will be reported to Immigration and Naturalization Services and they will be deported. MCWC counselors frequently see clients who are being threatened by this type of abusive behavior. MCWC continues to foster collaborative relationships with Lone Star Legal Aid, Boat People SOS, YWCA International, the University of Houston Immigration Law Clinic, and International Catholic Charities.

The U.S. national administration change in 2017 will most likely result in changes to immigration policy. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy passed by outgoing President Obama, is the most immediately vulnerable policy. For many immigrants, documented or undocumented, there is a fear of changing attitudes and policies that will threaten family stability. Many American immigrant families are of mixed status having documented and undocumented members. Aggressive deportation measures would have a huge impact on issues of social trust in multi-ethnic communities. Advocacy, law enforcement, and community development efforts will face these growing challenges as they work to ensure human rights protection to underserved and underrepresented populations.

# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem    Data Collection*

<p>Emerging Trends in Victimization (continued)</p>	<p><b><u>Human Trafficking</u></b></p> <p>Human trafficking has been called the modern day slavery. The United Nations estimates 27 million people worldwide are currently living in bondage. The U.S. State Department estimates there are 100,000 domestic and international human trafficking victims in the United States. Contrary to popular belief, “human trafficking” is rarely a crime committed by common street criminals. Instead, complex criminal enterprises with vast networks of people operate across expansive geographical areas. Human trafficking is a major source of profit for organized crime syndicates with U.S. citizens at work. Vulnerable groups include unaccompanied children, women and girls affected by domestic violence, minorities and victims of ethnic, racial, religious, and social discrimination, and other vulnerable individuals. There is little reliable data for the number of human trafficking victims in Texas because victims are difficult to identify and there is no coordinated statewide tracking system. However, the Houston area is well-known as a hub for human trafficking, particularly international human trafficking due to its high levels of international tourism and trade, as well as the proximity to the Mexican border. In 2016, the National Human Trafficking Hotline answered 26,727 calls, 7,621 of which were human trafficking cases. Texas ranked second to California in the number of calls placed to this hotline. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports that 25% of all international human trafficking victims certified by their agency were in Texas. The National Human Trafficking Resource Center which is a nationwide human trafficking tip line and resource for victims, logged a total of 21,947 phone calls in 2015 with Texas ranking second highest with 1,731 calls.</p> <p>In May 2015, the Justice for Victims of Human Trafficking Act of 2015, first introduced by the Texas Congressional delegation, was signed into law and broadened the benefits for adult and child victims of sex trafficking. The seriousness of this problem was clearly recognized when Senator Amy Klobuchar devoted several minutes of her speech at the Democratic National Convention (07-26-16) to this topic. Victims of human trafficking are difficult to identify and are among the most vulnerable to re-victimization. Approximately 1,600 beds in residential facilities nationwide are available to trafficking victims; however, there are at least 100,000 victims of human trafficking at any given time in the United States. The first step for a survivor of human trafficking is safety, which may include assistance from law enforcement, medical services, temporary housing, and basic human needs. Long term needs include counseling services, legal services, long-term affordable housing, substance abuse/dependency therapy, financial assistance, life and job skills training. Victim service providers have seen an increase in the number of human trafficking victims seeking services, especially victims of sex trafficking.</p>
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# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

### Emerging Trends in Victimization (continued)

The Montgomery County Women’s Center provided shelter services to 17 survivors of human trafficking in 2016, an increase of 68% from 2015. The availability of specialized and holistic services to assist victims’ efforts to take back their freedom and their lives is the only way to help them avoid falling prey once again to enslavement. Victims of human trafficking have everything ripped away from them and as a result they are in need of a vast array of services designed to meet their needs. Breaking free of this form of victimization can be particularly difficult because recovery is a long process and there are few long-term programs to meet this need. Nationally there are approximately 1,600 beds in residential facilities available to trafficking victims when there are at least 100,000 victims of human trafficking at any given time in the country. There is little hope for a human sex trafficking victim if, once “rescued”, there is no safe place with appropriate treatment programs to help these victims recover.

The first step for victims is safety which may include assistance from law enforcement, medical services, temporary housing, and basic human needs. Long term needs will include counseling services, legal services, long-term housing, substance abuse therapy, financial assistance, life skills and job skills training. This list is not meant to be an exhaustive one but to showcase the plethora of services to which victims of trafficking need to access in order to have a good chance to re-integrate into society and be successful.

The Montgomery County Women’s Center (“MCWC”) collaborates with Catholic Charities and supports the mission of United Against Human Trafficking and the Human Trafficking Rescue Alliance. A MCWC staff attorney was part of the initial formation of the Coalition and continues to offer guidance through participation in quarterly meetings while providing awareness of the sheltering, advocacy, and counseling services available to victims of human trafficking. All MCWC attorneys utilize their professional relationships with law enforcement, prosecutors, and community-based services providers to ensure that human trafficking victims qualify for the expanded benefits of PL 114-22. In the August 2016 meeting of the Montgomery County Coalition Against Human Trafficking Alliance, their agenda focused exclusively on training law enforcement to identify victims while seeking maximum penalties for offenders.

In January 2016, the Texas Attorney General announced a new unit dedicated to combating human trafficking. The Attorney General’s January 14<sup>th</sup> press release stated: “Sadly, Texas is at the heart of human trafficking in the United States. Houston has the highest number of trafficking victims in the nation, and Texas is the second highest in the nation for number of calls to the National Human Trafficking Resources Center.”

# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem    Data Collection*

<p>Emerging Trends in Victimization (continued)</p>	<p>The new Human Trafficking and Transnational Organized Crime (“HTTOC”) section of the Texas Attorney General’s office is headed by an experienced prosecutor with an extensive background in combating human trafficking in Texas and will help to fight back against the horrific crime of human trafficking through investigations, prosecutions, training and raising awareness. “Criminals steal many things from their victims, such as money, belongings and their sense of safety and well-being; but human trafficking is, simply put, the theft of a person’s very soul”, said Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton. “While trafficking is often associated with people from other countries, the victims of trafficking can and do come from anywhere, including right here in Texas.” In January 2017, Attorney General Paxton highlighted the work of the new HTTOC and announced a new initiative to mobilize as many Texans as possible in the fight against trafficking. Under the leadership of Deputy Criminal Chief Kirsta Leeburg Melton, the HTTOC has assisted or consulted on dozens of cases, such as the arrest of the CEO of Backpage.com, whose online “adult” ads have been linked to sex trafficking of women and children. HTTOC also teamed up with Truckers Against Trafficking and the Texas Trucking Association on an innovative public-private program that puts more eyes and ears on the road to help catch human trafficking. In 2016, HTTOC provided human trafficking awareness training to almost 8,000 people across Texas, including law enforcement officials, educators, medical professionals, students and lawyers.</p> <p>The OAG’s office will be completing a comprehensive training video on human trafficking awareness which will initially be made available to all 315,000 Texas state employees and will be mandatory viewing for the OAG’s 4,000 employees. The video is intended to teach viewers how to detect and report suspected human trafficking activity.</p> <p>Mission Northeast and Heaven’s Army are faith-based nonprofits in east Montgomery County. They provide basic needs services for residents. Heaven’s Army also provides human trafficking awareness services, and in 2015, they opened the Heaven’s Army Home of Amazing Grace, providing shelter to women in need.</p> <p>There are some organizations working to develop residential treatment programs for trafficking victims in the county but funding issues have delayed the full development of their services. Other non-human trafficking specific victim service providers can provide some of the necessary services but with funding limitations and a lack of coordination of services, there is no way to ensure that trafficking victims are protected and receive the full array of services they desperately need.</p>
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# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

Emerging Trends  
in Victimization  
(continued)

### **Cyber-crimes**

Most of this Plan focuses on the physical and emotional impact on victims of violent crimes, but cyber thieves, bullies and offenders can have just as devastating an impact on victims and is a growing crime trend. In today's society, we depend on the internet and digital tools for all aspects of our lives -- from mobile devices to online commerce and social networking. Predators increasingly utilize technology to prey upon victims and it is essential for all of us to become more aware and educated on the technology. Our children are especially vulnerable and adults must be responsible for their on-line safety. As an example, a man may befriend a young girl online pretending to be a young girl in an internet chat room and lure her away from her home to be sexually assaulted. In response, we must be hyper-vigilant in educating our community's children about these camouflaged dangers.

In 2015, nearly 21% of students reported being bullied at school and meta analysis of bullying studies indicates a mean prevalence rate of traditional bullying at 35% and cyberbullying at 15%. (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016 and Modecki, Minchin, Harbaugh, Guerra & Runions, 2014). Significantly, research indicates that 64% of students who are bullied do not report it to anyone (Petrosina, Guckenburger, DeVoe, & Hanson, 2010) and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine have determined that cyberbullying is now a serious public health problem in this country. David's Law (SB 179), named after a Texas youth who committed suicide after being harassed and threatened through social media, acknowledged the seriousness of this problem in Texas, and makes cyberbullying a misdemeanor offense since September 1, 2017.

Cyber-stalking is a technologically based "attack" on an individual who has been targeted specifically for that attack for reasons of anger, revenge, or control and is seen often in domestic/family violence situations. Technology has evolved faster than many of us realize and definitely faster than many adults can keep up with. Because of advancements in technology, officials are now advising women who enter shelters for safety to turn off the GPS tracking on their phones, change privacy settings on their social media pages and, due to geo-tagging, warn them to be more vigilant about what they post online so their offenders are less likely to find them.

In an increasingly electronic world, cyber-aggressors rely on technology to torment others. Cyber-bullying occurs when the internet, cell phones, and/or other devices are used to send or post texts or images intended to hurt or embarrass their victims. Cyber-bullies may also attempt to destroy or smear a victim's reputation with emails, blogs, forum posts, text messages, and other electronic media.

# Victim Issues— Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem    Data Collection*

<p>Emerging Trends in Victimization (continued)</p>	<p>In a study released in 2016, the Cyberbullying Research Center surveyed a nationally-representative sample of 5,700 middle and high school students between the ages of 12 and 17 in the United States. Data was collected between July and October 2016. According to the survey, 34% of the students reported experiencing cyberbullying in their lifetimes. Approximately 12% of the students admitted to cyberbullying others in their lifetime. Spreading rumors online was the most commonly reported type of cyberbullying they reported during the previous 30 days. Adolescent girls are significantly more likely to have experienced cyberbullying in their lifetimes (36.7% vs. 30.5%) and in the most recent 30 days (7.7% vs. 4.4%). This gap narrows when reviewing experiences over the previous 30 days with boys slightly more likely to report cyberbullying others during their lifetime (12.7% vs. 10.2%). The type of cyberbullying tends to differ by gender; girls were more likely to say someone spread rumors about them online while boys were more likely to say that someone threatened to hurt them online. This was the first sample collected by the Cyberbullying Research Center where boys reported significantly more involvement in every type of cyberbullying offending behavior covered in their survey. In the past, this varied by type of behavior. Law enforcement is being increasingly confronted with cyber-crimes complaints due to the prevalence of technology used by children and youth, but the increase of technology across all age groups lends itself to the increase in all types of cyber-crimes. These crimes come in many forms, i.e. identity theft, financial fraud, sexting, online solicitation of minors, e-scams, malware, cyber-stalking, hacking, geo-tagging, phishing, intellectual property crime, and more. The list continues to grow as criminals figure out how to turn technology that is useful for most people into harming the innocent. The victims of these crimes are often left without compensation or justice as cyber-crimes are difficult to investigate and prosecute, often crossing legal jurisdictions and international boundaries.</p>
<p><b><i>Solution:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase awareness about online exploitation and cyber-crimes to educate and empower members of our community through outreach and educational programs.</li> <li>• Increase awareness among law enforcement and service providers about human trafficking issues and the specialized needs unique to this type of victimization through outreach and educational programs.</li> <li>• Continue to work within our schools to educate kids about refraining from taking, posting or sharing nude, intimate, potentially embarrassing or demeaning etc. type pictures with their boy/girlfriend because once posted, it can never be deleted from cyber-space and the possible ramifications for both the victim and the offender.</li> </ul>	

# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## ***Solution (continued):***

- Promote public education and provide legal updates, etc. to educate and warn citizens about these types of crimes to limit the number of people falling prey to cyber-crimes.
- Utilize programs sponsored by the Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County, Inc. (“DRC-MC”). The DRC-MC offers mediation services and conflict resolution training to all Montgomery County residents, including students. With the assistance of volunteer mediators, individuals learn techniques which help to minimize conflict, promote tolerance and understanding, and improve communication so that conflicts do not escalate into violence or bullying. Additionally, students throughout Montgomery County should be encouraged to participate in the DRC-MC’s Annual Conflict Resolution Day bookmark Art Contest which starts at the beginning of each new school year.
- Educate the public on criminal penalties for cyber-bullying under David’s Law (SB 179).
- Develop informational community forums to communicate with immigrant communities and community resource providers in Montgomery County about any federal changes impacting immigration policies and crime victim rights issues.
- Develop collaborations with providers of immigration services for crime victims in Montgomery County

## ***Identified Problem Data Collection***

### **Lack of Adequate Social Infrastructure**

Community issues and challenges were raised in discussion groups at the Regional Healthcare Partnership (RHP) 17 Regional Health Assessment 2013 conducted by researchers at Texas A&M University Health and Sciences Department. Many of the challenges discussed pertain to our community in the context of this Criminal Justice Plan. The 2013 RHP Assessment made it clear that there is a significant lack of adequate social infrastructure in Montgomery County. The assessment highlighted gaps in access to healthcare, transportation, and affordable housing. The assessment also detailed the challenges faced by non-English speaking residents accessing services and the general geographical disparity of service availability within parts of the county (outside Conroe and The Woodlands). In the Spring of 2015, each RHP worked with service providers and key stakeholders to update and submit fully revised RHP Plans to the Health & Human Services Commission. RHP 17 was the first region in the state to submit a signed and certified RHP Plan to HHSC.

In late 2016, the Texas Familias Council launched the Texas HOPE Consortium in the Conroe area to support the collaborative process of community resource organizations. This Consortium meets quarterly to help make intercultural and cross-sector connections for resource professionals seeking support and tools to better serve a quickly growing county. Additional outreach support is also focused on the East Montgomery County corridor. This region of the county is facing significant growth challenges as Texas State Highway 99 has now connected one edge of the county with the other, and is rapidly attracting

# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem    Data Collection*

<p>Lack of Adequate Social Infrastructure (continued)</p>	<p>new development as well as underserved and underrepresented populations.</p> <p><b><u>Transportation</u></b></p> <p>The population of Montgomery County, Texas, with a land area of 1041.71 square miles, has been estimated by the United States Census Bureau at 556,203 as of July 1, 2016 (a 22% increase from 2010).</p> <p>Census Bureau population estimates for 2015 establish that for those large counties (i.e., populations of 250,000 or more), Montgomery County is the second fastest growing county in Texas. Depending on migration rates <u>and</u> with a growth rate between five and six percent per annum, the 2010 census population of 455,746 is projected to top one million in the next 20 to 25 years.</p> <p>Even though Montgomery County is one of the fastest growing counties in the entire country, there is no mass/public transportation which presents a barrier to self-sufficiency for a large portion of the county’s low-income population. This gap negatively impacts access to available services that are desperately needed, particularly among low-income and vulnerable populations. For example, many domestic violence victims as well as those in need of mental health services do not have their own transportation and, if they do, the cost of gasoline limits victims’ ability to travel to access needed services.</p> <p>In January 2015, the City of Conroe Transit Department (formed in 2013) began meeting the transit and mobility needs of Conroe residents but not the entirety of Montgomery County. The first project, Conroe Connection, connects people with jobs, services, and shopping along Frazier Street at Loop 336 and in the Dugan area via a fixed route business line (in a 21 passenger bus) which is operated Monday through Friday. The cost of the bus service is 75 cents for seniors and students, and \$1.00 for fixed route buses. Although this service is much appreciated, it is very limited and does not serve the outlying areas of Montgomery County. The City of Conroe is accepting public input on where to add stops and expand the Conroe Connection bus line, but many people in our community are unclear on the process to formally submit recommendations. Infrastructure improvement projects will need to be completed to accommodate additional bus stops before some key public service agencies would be accessible by the bus line. No other parts of Montgomery County have transportation services to connect to the Conroe Connection bus line at this time.</p> <p>A few organizations such as Meals on Wheels Montgomery County and Interfaith of The Woodlands offer some much appreciated transportation; however, transportation is very limited and not open to the public. Meals on Wheels Montgomery County hired a Mobility Manager in 2015 to oversee existing Meals on Wheels transportation programs and research other transportation solutions for Montgomery</p>
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# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## **Identified Problem      Data Collection**

Lack of Adequate Social Infrastructure (continued)

County residents through a grant from Montgomery County United Way. In 2016, Meals on Wheels Montgomery County began development for an additional pilot program offering limited bus transportation to residents in need in the Willis/Conroe area. Public awareness and orientation are key to this program's success, and they are currently in the process of collaborating with community partners to guide new transportation users through the available routes and services. They are incorporating culturally sensitive guidance to families that might struggle with language barriers.

### **Bilingual Services**

Montgomery County's Hispanic/Latino population is young and continues to grow rapidly throughout the county. In 2010, the U.S. Census reported the county's Hispanic/Latino population to be 94,798. In 2015, this population was estimated to be 124,176, a 30.9% increase. Montgomery County's ethnic population growth has been predominately driven by its Hispanic/Latino community. The African American population in 2014 was estimated at 4.9% and the Asian population at 2.7%, while the Hispanic Latino population was 23.1%. U.S. Census data from 2009-2013 reported that 12.9% of Montgomery County's population was foreign born, and 19.2% of the population spoke a language other than English at home. Regionally, growth rate patterns differ. The city of Conroe is 38.5% Hispanic/Latino. Montgomery ISD, in the west, reported its Hispanic/Latino student population to be 13.9%, and New Caney ISD, in the east region of the county, reported its student population at 54.9% Hispanic/Latino – the first district in Montgomery County to pass the 50% threshold.

Of students attending Lone Star College - Montgomery in the Fall 2017 semester, 31.3% of students were White, 38.7% were Hispanic, and 15.7% were Black. However, a small percentage of the teaching faculty at LSC are bilingual. At the Conroe Independent School District, 35.9% of students were Hispanic with 50% White; these statistics were almost identical from those reported in 2015. The Texas Familias Council, a professional community development volunteer organization, has focused on advocacy, policy, and the development of the young Hispanic/Latino population in Montgomery County since 2011. The Council cites limited avenues of public communication countywide to guide isolated, Spanish-speaking communities toward key resources. It has seen significant growth in the Hispanic/Latino population in rural communities, as Houston experiences rapid development and gentrification – pushing ethnic enclaves outside of the city. Bilingual and bicultural professionals are limited within most social service organizations and key public offices serving Montgomery County. The Texas Familias Council believes that prioritizing cultural competency training, together with bilingual signage and materials, will better prepare professionals and paraprofessionals in serving transitioning and diverse communities, while helping the assimilation process of new immigrants.

# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem    Data Collection*

<p>Lack of Adequate Social Infrastructure (continued)</p>	<p>These approaches of care and engagement also promote more advocacy from within the local Hispanic/Latino community.</p> <p>Lone Star Family Health Center and Montgomery County Youth Services are diversifying their staff to meet the needs of their patients/clients seeking health and mental health care services. The Montgomery County Women’s Center, who serves family violence and sexual assault victims, has bilingual therapists and advocates; however, the non-English speaking victim population continues to grow. Attracting and retaining qualified bilingual professionals continues to be an issue in Montgomery County.</p> <p>The Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County, Inc. (“DRC-MC”) offers affordable (free, in appropriate cases) bilingual mediation services to assist Spanish-speaking persons to resolve all types of conflicts, including but not limited to landlord/tenant disputes, contractual issues, divorces (child custody, visitation, etc.) and CPS cases, etc. The DRC-MC also offers training to law enforcement personnel regarding how to utilize mediation skills when interacting with the public.</p> <p><b><u>Mental Health</u></b></p> <p>Montgomery County became listed as a Federally Designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Area as of March 2010 with 4.3 million Texans having a diagnosable mental health disorder including 1.2 million children. According to the 2016 County Health Rankings, the ratio of population to mental health providers in Montgomery County is 1,514:1, a 10% negative change from 2015. In its last few sessions, the Texas Legislature has increased funding for mental health services; however, Texas is still running close to dead last nationally in funding of behavioral and mental health infrastructure for its citizens. As the population of Texas continues to grow exponentially each year, there is not enough funding in the state budget to adequately serve its residents’ mental health needs. This often leaves counties and health care organizations having to bridge the gap locally. Tri-County Services, an organization that provides mental health services in Montgomery County, was able to increase the number of individuals it serves because of an increase in funding from the state. In 2013, Tri-County was serving 1,480 adults annually, and today it serves approximately 3,000 each year. Of these Texans, 1.5 million were deemed not able to function at work, school or in the community due to their illness. A child living in Texas has less of a chance to receive necessary mental health treatment than children living in any other state. More than 16% of Texans are uninsured, 17.13% of Montgomery County residents are uninsured, and this goes hand in hand with the previously stated financial hardships and non-livable wages of crime victims in Montgomery County which limits their ability to be self-sufficient and independent from their abuser.</p>
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# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem      Data Collection*

<p>Lack of Adequate Social Infrastructure (continued)</p>	<p>Texas consistently lags towards the bottom of states in terms of per capita mental health and substance abuse services. From 2006 to 2009, Texas ranked last in the nation in per-capita spending on mental health services, according to the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. Victims as well as offenders experience mental health disorders that exacerbate their family violence situations. Mental health crisis services must be available to this un-served population or the cycle of non-treatment and recidivism will continue. Victims can experience preclusion from conventional services due to programs' inability to take care of this population and offenders are not afforded this particular assistance for being the offender. At present there is no healthy relationship-type counseling for these victims and without the appropriate mental health component to their support system, there will not be measureable reductions to their victimization.</p> <p>In Spring 2016, Montgomery County commissioners authorized a new mental health treatment court which allows mentally ill defendants accused of nonviolent crimes to seek treatment rather than face punishment. This new mental health court started hearing cases in August 2016. The voluntary program lasts 12 to 24 months and includes psychiatric treatment, medical care, public benefits and services like housing assistance and job placement. Defendants must be found legally competent before choosing to enter the program. The defendants become clients once they enter the program. They leave jail on probation or bond supervision. A treatment plan may include substance abuse treatment, psychiatric counseling and medications. For indigent participants, free counseling is provided through the Tri-County Behavioral Health program.</p> <p>Gender and sexual minorities often face challenges and barriers to accessing needed health services and, as a result, can experience worse health outcomes. These challenges can include stigma, discrimination, violence, and rejection by families and communities, as well as other barriers, such as inequality in the workplace and health insurance sectors, the provision of substandard care, and outright denial of care because of an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Montgomery County's veteran population was 39,141 in 2015. This is a vulnerable population that often goes underserved, and is at risk for PTSD and other mental health issues. Another key barrier is the cultural stigma of mental health issues and care disparities among diverse populations. Strong cultural mores deter victims of crime from seeking mental health support, as do misconceptions of immigration law for undocumented victims who fear deportation. Isolation and lack of basic outreach services to these vulnerable communities create real mental health issues within disempowered families, and foster more opportunities for abuse of desperate individuals.</p>
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# Victim Issues— Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem    Data Collection*

<p>Lack of Adequate Social Infrastructure (continued)</p>	<p>Suicide can be fueled by isolation and lack of adequate support services. For victims of abuse or violence, this danger is increased. In the 2014 American Psychological Association report, “Suicide and Intimate Partner Violence”, Rebecca A. Clay writes: “Suicide and intimate partner violence are both major public health crisis, and they’re closely linked, says Richard McKeon, PhD, chief of the suicide prevention branch at the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Survivors of intimate partner violence are twice as likely to attempt suicide multiple times, he points out, and cases of murder-suicide are most likely to occur in the context of abuse. Yet despite the clear link, the mental health and intimate partner violence fields have historically worked in isolation.” According to the Centers for Disease Control in 2015, “Based on data about suicides in 16 National Violent Death Reporting System states in 2010, 33.4% of suicide decedents tested positive for alcohol, 23.8% for antidepressants, and 20% for opiates, including heroin and prescription pain killers.” These converging mental health factors require accessible care that is greatly needed in Montgomery County.</p> <p>In 2015, the Lone Star Family Health Center, a federally funded nonprofit health center, added two full time mental health therapists, including one who is bilingual. With services offered to insured and uninsured patients, the Center reported that the therapists’ appointments immediately filled up with child and adult patients. The demand for mental health support services continues in 2016. The Center is seeking a psychiatrist, but notes the difficulty in finding one due to the scarcity of bilingual psychiatrists in the nation.</p> <p><b><u>Affordable Housing</u></b></p> <p>The Crisis Assistance Center and Montgomery County Women’s Center staff and volunteers are among those continually challenged to assist residents in crisis (including domestic violence victims and those with mental illness) in finding affordable housing in Montgomery County and the surrounding areas. They work individually and together to help those in need with rent and utilities. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, “domestic violence is the immediate cause of homelessness for many women. Survivors of domestic violence are often isolated from support networks and financial resources by their abusers. As a result, they may lack steady income, employment history, credit history, and landlord references.” According to The Network for Public Health Law, “Domestic violence impacts more than just the victim’s physical and psychological well-being. In fact, there is a strong nexus between domestic violence and homelessness, which creates additional challenges. Homeless individuals are at a high risk for poor physical and mental health. Homeless individuals are at a high risk for poor physical and mental health. Individuals without homes often have problems accessing healthcare services, resulting in increased rates of chronic health problems, mental illness, substance abuse, and sexually transmitted diseases.</p>
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# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem      Data Collection*

<p>Lack of Adequate Social Infrastructure (continued)</p>	<p>Due to the complex safety needs and potential abuse faced by victims, traditional homeless shelters and temporary housing programs are frequently inadequate or unsafe. In response, many states have enacted laws to aid victims in securing or retaining safe housing solutions.... During a 24-hour survey period in 2015, 48% of unmet service requests at domestic violence programs were for housing.”</p> <p>The Montgomery County Housing Authority is responsible for issuing Section 8 Housing Subsidy Vouchers. According to the 2016 Quarter 4 Picture of Subsidized Households (“PSH”) database, the Montgomery County Housing Authority’s voucher program has an annual turnover of 5% having issued approximately 73 vouchers in 2016. The average voucher holder has received housing benefits for 7 years and 10 months. According to the 2016 PSH, persons who were issued a voucher in the preceding 12 months waited an average of 22 months on the waiting list. The average voucher household contains 2.3 persons and has a household income of \$13,411 per year. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of all voucher households were headed by minorities with 62% being Black and 1% Hispanic. Of all households participating in the Montgomery County Housing Choice Voucher program, 22% include at least one person with a disability, 40% of households with a head of household 61 years or less were headed by a person with a disability. Fifty-five percent (55%) of households headed by someone 62 or older were headed by a person with a disability.</p> <p>According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Montgomery County’s veteran population in 2016 was 32,381. This is a vulnerable population that often goes underserved, and is at risk for mental health issues. Unfortunately, there are no permanent housing solutions for veterans who are homeless in Montgomery County; however, federal housing vouchers are available through several programs, including the Veterans Administration (VA) and Housing Choice Vouchers administered by the U.S. Housing &amp; Urban Development (HUD) through local public housing agencies.</p> <p>The Texas Familias Council reports that many rural areas of Montgomery County have seen housing issues resulting from crudely developed private land unscrupulously sold at low cost to predominately Hispanic/Latino individuals unable to build adequate housing. The result has been a growing crisis of new families housed in small dwellings without water or sewage. Basic infrastructure of services and roads have created dire needs in these communities resulting from the outer push of Houston’s growth and gentrification. The Council is researching the comprehensive needs of these communities and available resources, but notes that these are long-term efforts requiring strong collaborative investments between county government, businesses, school districts, and social service organizations.</p>
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# Victim Issues— Listed in priority order

***Identified Problem    Data Collection***

<p>Lack of Adequate Social Infrastructure (continued)</p>	<p>Fill The Gap, a Peace and Justice Network (“PJN”) program administered locally by Interfaith of The Woodlands, raises money to provide housing and utility deposits for Montgomery County residents who are homeless or on the verge of becoming homeless. According to the PJN chair, “It is estimated that more than 3,500 adults and children are homeless in our county. Almost 1,000 children in our schools are unable to list a permanent address. Many programs will pay rent and other expenses, but very few can pay deposits. This leaves a gap in services that can become a barrier to establishing a stable residence.” The Fill The Gap program is helpful to a limited group of persons who are employed but cannot afford rent and/or utility deposits; however, it does not assist with rent or otherwise address long-term affordable housing needs in the community. Some families living from paycheck to paycheck fall into homelessness due to some unforeseen financial challenge, such as losing a job, a medical emergency or other unexpected bill, which creates a situation where the family cannot maintain their housing. Funds for sufficient staff and prevention efforts on the homeless front are a huge barrier to resolution and help in the community. Additionally, case management, education and counseling efforts on a massive collaborative scale (such as being undertaken by the Hands Up philosophy that the Crisis Assistance Center implemented in 2014) are imperative to have growth. As far as housing, the needs include both transitional as well as permanent affordable housing in Montgomery County.</p>
<p><b><i>Solution:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stronger collaborative efforts from a multi-sector field are needed to provide integrated care services to victims of crime. New efforts should be embraced and encouraged from within the county, and from outside the existing network to foster innovative approaches to complex issues that have long been underserved.</li> <li>• Raising the infrastructure to a higher and more effective level in Montgomery County will help victims of domestic violence and other crimes as well as the homeless and those with mental illness and will positively impact all residents living in poverty throughout Montgomery County.</li> <li>• Public transportation is critical part of the solution to the transportation issues facing victims who requires to resolve problems. Long-term solutions to public transportation must continue to be studied. Short-term, funding for gas vouchers needs to be increased. Expansion of existing transportation services are vital investments for local municipalities.</li> <li>• Additional funding is needed to hire qualified bilingual/bicultural professionals to work with crime victim advocates as well as provide direct services within the medical, legal and crisis intervention advocacy communities. Too often these professionals quickly become overwhelmed by the greatly underserved need and internal organizational support is key to their retention. Including diverse voices of guidance and perspectives in decision-making is also key to a well-rounded organization.</li> </ul>	

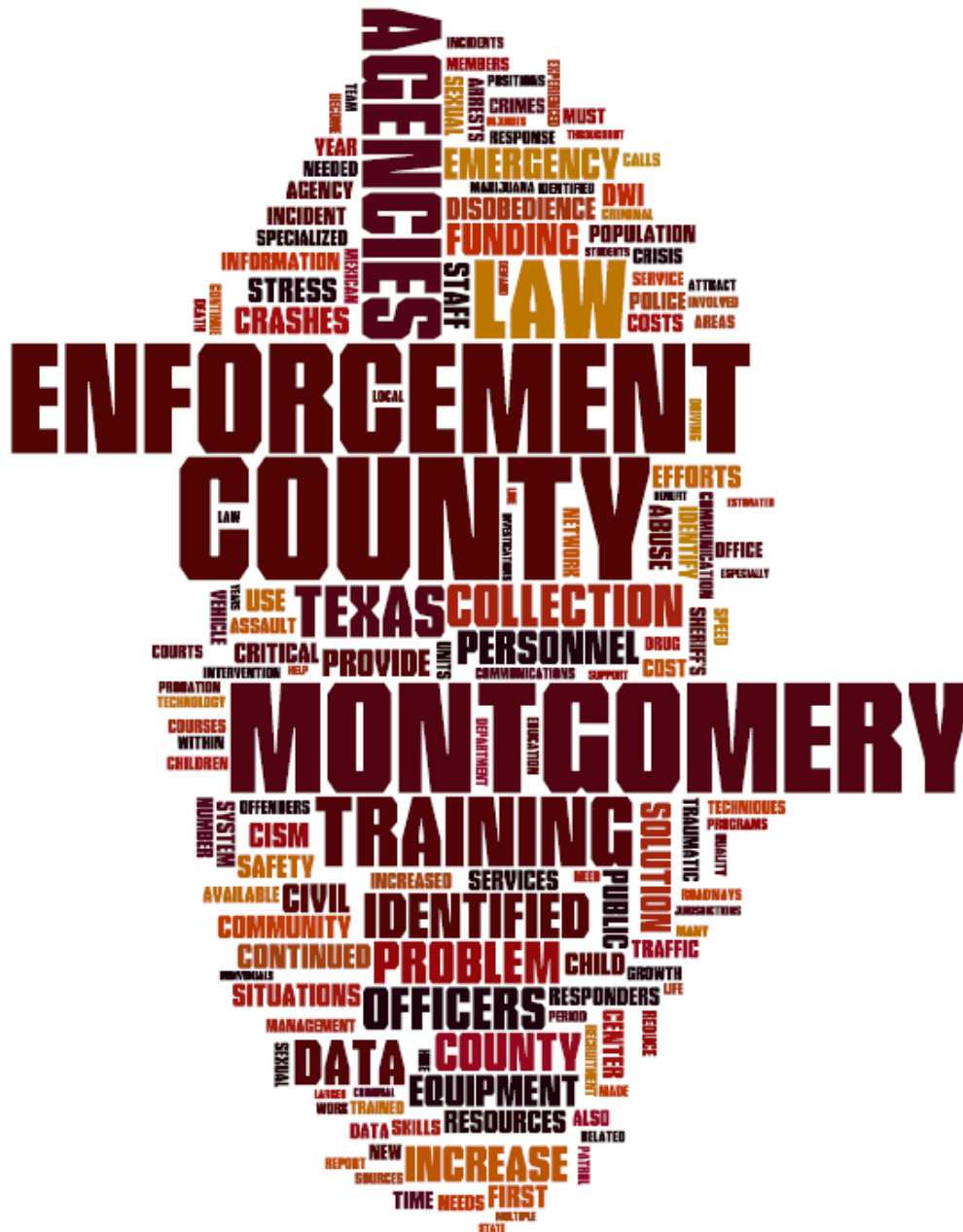
# Victim Issues—

Listed in priority order

## ***Solution:***

- Community awareness efforts are key to increase support for outreach and services to diverse populations. Every area of need and the development of essential infrastructure are impacted by rapid growth, and a larger Hispanic/Latino population. There has been a need in proper cultural competency and services to new and existing ethnic communities. Community efforts that encourage intercultural opportunities that seek to empower will help accelerate new services and attract new funding in the county.
- Because mental health disorders exacerbate family violence situations, an investment in further mental health treatment capability, including residential treatment, in Montgomery County is imperative. And, financial assistance for critical medications to treat mental health conditions is especially crucial. Pharmaceutical companies can be enticed to help.
- A strong investment in affordable housing in Montgomery County is crucial to both survivors of domestic violence and homeless or persons who are at risk of homelessness. The solution to chronic homelessness is permanent supportive housing and/or a transitional supportive housing program. Stable housing together with needed supportive services creates a cost-effective solution to homelessness. Strong educational programs provided by private financial institutions is an effective tool in guiding first-time homeowners who often lack the financial knowledge needed to invest and maintain a home.
- Implement a “Housing First” Program in Montgomery County. This is a model which is based on the concept that individuals who are homeless can more effectively deal with other issues (such as addiction, employment and physical or mental health) as well as being a victim of domestic abuse/violence once they have stable housing.
- The decriminalization of mental health as well as the decriminalization of homelessness are crucial to the community. The new Mental Health Court promotes safety, health, accountability, responsibility and successful support systems. It also saves the county and taxpayers money and benefits both the defendants and the public.
- Strengthen victims’ long-term recovery by reinforcing both family and community support systems with programs and services that provide guidance in nurturing connections.
- Create a Mental Health Resource Guide with resources and education dispelling stigmas and misconceptions about mental health, and support new avenues of bilingual communication across the county to reach isolated Spanish-speaking populations. Tri-County Behavioral Health has implemented a Network for Care website for mental health resources, but local agencies need to keep their information up to date and the public needs to be educated on the availability of this resource.

# Law Enforcement Issues





# Law Enforcement Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem    Data Collection*

<p>Effective and Consistent Enforcement of DWI Offenders is Necessary to Ensure Public Safety on the Roadways</p>	<p>In Montgomery County, Texas, DWI continues to be the number one crime committed and the number one cause of death. The population increase in Montgomery County, Texas has been staggering over the last decade and is now estimated at over 590,000. The increase in population brings with it increased traffic on the highways and increased instances of DWI.</p> <p>The social and financial impact on Montgomery County and its citizens resulting from DWI drivers is enormous. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimated that the average alcohol related fatality due to a motor vehicle accident in Texas costs several million dollars to settle. That does not include legal and court costs and property damage.</p> <p>In 2016, 987 people died on Texas roadways in alcohol related crashes. This is 26% of all motor vehicle fatalities. Nearly 52% of those fatalities occurred in rural areas. In 2016, single vehicle run-off the road crashes resulted in 34.27% of Texas roadway deaths.</p> <p>According to the Texas Department of State Health Services, Montgomery County is the 11<sup>th</sup> most populated county in Texas. In 2016, Montgomery County was tied for the 7<sup>th</sup> most vehicular fatalities in the state and 1 fatality for every 7,590 people. This placed Montgomery County as having the most vehicular fatalities per population for counties with over 500,000 people. Montgomery County had the second most alcohol related fatalities per population for counties with over 500,000 people, just behind Dallas County and just ahead of Harris County. Over the last decade, Montgomery County has averaged 65 fatalities a year in car crashes. Of the fatal crashes for 2016, 28% were related to driving under the influence of alcohol. In 2016, 2288 Driving While Intoxicated cases were filed in Montgomery County, up 251 from 2015. The average blood alcohol concentration was 0.18 for blood samples obtained via search warrant during No Refusal Operations. 544 blood search warrants were obtained in DWI cases, an increase of 50 from 2015.</p> <p>It is important to keep the highways and streets as safe as possible. One way to accomplish this is with consistent and resilient enforcement of impaired driving laws. Enforcement coupled with aggressive prosecution would help deter impaired driving and save countless lives and prevent injuries on the roadways in Montgomery County. The continuation of the Montgomery County District Attorney's Office (MCDA) No Refusal Program (TxDOT grant) is crucial to effective and efficient prosecution of DWI related charges. Additionally, pro-active enforcement of existing laws, in reference to the over serving of alcoholic beverages to patrons in licensed alcoholic beverage establishments, could assist in lowering the number of impaired drivers on the highways and streets of Montgomery County.</p>
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# Law Enforcement Issues—

Listed in priority order

## **Identified Problem    Data Collection**

<p>Effective and Consistent Enforcement of DWI Offenders is Necessary to Ensure Public Safety on the Roadways (continued)</p>	<p>However, presently, the number one need for effective DWI deterrence in Montgomery County would be an inter-agency and/or a multi-agency DWI task force. The Constable’s Offices are working to create a DWI task force with deputies from each of their agencies; however, it is still in its infancy.</p> <p>To become more efficient and effective at making DWI arrests, we need full time DWI officers from all county agencies who are specially trained and committed to consistent DWI enforcement and have the flexibility within their agencies to focus solely on these types of cases.</p>
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<p><b>Solution:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify funding sources to procure enhanced DWI enforcement that also allows for more expedient processing of DWI prisoners and evidence. Police have traditionally engaged in reactive enforcement by responding to impaired driving as patrol and traffic officers have detected them. Detecting, stopping, and arresting impaired drivers removes them from the streets, and the sanctions those offenders receive should act as a deterrent to similar occurrences in the future.</li> <li>• Reactive enforcement strategies can be augmented by “looking beyond the ticket” for other criminal violations, reducing the amount of time a patrol officer spends processing a DWI arrest, detecting a larger proportion of impaired drivers, all coupled with aggressive prosecution and strong support from the judiciary. Many jurisdictions have implemented programs to further those objectives.</li> <li>• Identify funding sources to implement educational promotions with the media and other outlets to publicize reactive enforcement efforts and education to increase drivers’ perception of risk and punishment.</li> <li>• Identify funding sources to implement pro-active enforcement of existing laws, in reference to the over serving of alcoholic beverages to patrons in licensed alcoholic beverage serving establishments.</li> <li>• Identify funding sources to create and employ inter-agency DWI task force officers and/or a county-wide multi-agency DWI task force.</li> </ul>	
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## **Identified Problem    Data Collection**

<p>Outdated and Worn out equipment</p>	<p>Montgomery County is one of the fastest growing counties in Texas. With the massive growth in both residential and commercial construction, the population has increased in the community at a prodigious rate. Every law enforcement agency in Montgomery County has also experienced a similar growth within their agencies.</p> <p>Commonly identified equipment needs include body armor, laptop/mobile computers, radar units, portable breath test equipment, surveillance equipment, forensic equipment, training aids, radios, photography equipment, specialized equipment for SWAT negotiations, Special Investigations Unit investigations, Gang intelligence Unit investigations, and standard patrol equipment.</p>
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# Law Enforcement Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

<p>Outdated and Worn out equipment (continued)</p>	<p>For example, body armor is guaranteed by the manufacturer for five years, and should be replaced after that to ensure the rated protection. Although the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Act grants from the federal government help with funding, agencies are allotted only a few vests per year, and the grant only covers half the costs. With vests costing \$500 to \$800, this is a large expenditure. Radios have a life cycle of about ten years before technological advances require a change, and they cost \$2,500 or more. The life cycle of computers is three years before software changes require new hardware, and ruggedized mobile computers cost from \$3,000 to almost \$5,000 per unit. Mobile video systems and body-worn cameras are now commonplace have added to the capital replacement costs of equipment for modern law enforcement agencies. For many jurisdictions, these costs must be supported by the general fund. Recent legislation restricting annexation authority of cities will make it increasingly difficult to develop the funding to support LE agencies.</p>
<p><b>Solution:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Modern law enforcement is technologically based. Therefore, equipment for law enforcement agencies needs funding to meet the most current technology in order for law enforcement to police the community in a safe, effective and efficient manner.</li></ul>	

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

<p>Law enforcement Recruitment and Hiring Efforts to Attract and Hire Qualified Personnel for Agencies in Montgomery County</p>	<p>Montgomery County has over thirty local agencies that employ law enforcement officers and support staff. Each of these agencies compete with each other, as well as the local agencies in the Greater Houston area, and various state and federal agencies, for applicants who possess the educational requirements and character that will enable them to pass the background investigation, criminal history check, drug test, physical fitness, and any other tests required by these agencies and be able to be hired. After being hired, these same agencies struggle at times to retain good employees and not lose them to other agencies that have better pay, signing bonuses, benefits, training opportunities, assignments, etc.</p> <p>A negative environment nationally, and vicious media and political attacks on officers involved in critical incidents, as well as pension issues throughout the nation, has made recruiting qualified applicants increasingly more difficult, with many large agencies experiencing great numbers of retirements without the ability to recruit sufficient numbers of replacements. Although local agencies are experiencing this problem, it is affecting all agencies throughout the state and nation.</p> <p>A survey was conducted in October 2012 of local law enforcement agencies for the time period of October 1, 2011 through September 30, 2012. The respondents included the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office, Willis PD, Sam Houston State University PD, Conroe ISD PD, Cut and Shoot PD, Conroe PD, Magnolia PD, Panorama PD, and Shenandoah PD.</p>
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# Law Enforcement Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem*

## *Data Collection*

Law enforcement Recruitment and Hiring Efforts to Attract and Hire Qualified Personnel for Agencies in Montgomery County (continued)

Only two of the agencies, both smaller, did not have any turnover in positions. Reasons for turnover included promotions, demotions, retirements, termination, and resignations for family, disciplinary, and new opportunities at other agencies or in the private sector that were where the employee wanted to be located. Of these reasons, only a few were due to higher wages. Excluding disciplinary resignations, and those for an unknown reason, the leading reasons for leaving an agency had to do with personal reasons, such as changing to a preferred locale, or tending to ill family members. Only one agency offered a hiring bonus, and stated that it was effective in hiring good, experienced employees, who were then encouraged to stay through high pay, great fringe benefits, and good agency leadership.

Agencies that did not have a hiring bonus cited fair treatment, opportunity for advancement, job satisfaction, opportunity for employee input, training opportunities, competitive pay, adequate recognition, esprit de corps and pride in the organization and coworkers, good supervision and agency leadership, adequate equipment, and employees who wanted to reside in the area for personal reasons as ways to retain personnel.

When asked what programs would be implemented if money was available, agencies cited step pay tied to years of service, increased vacation based on years of service, education incentives, take-home vehicles, opportunities for more self-initiated programs by the officers, adjusting pay scales to be more competitive, and developing an integrated approach to recruit and retain employees since employees come to and stay with organizations for various reasons.

In October 2017, the survey was repeated for the time period of October 1, 2016 through September 30, 2017, with eight agencies responding. All experienced changes in personnel. While there were some changes due to disciplinary, the respondents reported that many left the agency to pursue more lucrative positions at other LE agencies or outside of law enforcement. None had hiring bonuses, although one agency pays newly hired officers a 1% premium per year of experience up to five years. Most agencies reported they could not afford hiring bonuses, with some saying it wouldn't have any effect other than to increase the number of non-qualified applicants. One respondent stated that he wanted people who wanted to serve rather than someone just there for the money. Ideas that were believed by respondents to increase recruitment and retention included the mission of the agency, competitive wages and benefits, the work environment and autonomy of the officers, the locale and community atmosphere, increasing vacation time, certificate pay, take home vehicles, staffing, and providing opportunities for obtaining a college degree.

# Law Enforcement Issues—

Listed in priority order

## ***Solution:***

- Identify funding sources to assist Montgomery County law enforcement efforts to attract, hire, and retain competent and capable staff; to develop programs for teenagers and young adults that can deter them from making bad decisions with regard to drugs or criminal activity that will preclude their future employment in law enforcement; recruitment of youth through Law Enforcement Explorer Posts that can help provide a pool of local applicants who want to make their professional life in the field of law enforcement within Montgomery County; creating working environments within agencies and communities that meet the needs of employees and contribute to retention; wages and benefit plans that are competitive with surrounding agencies.

## ***Identified Problem      Data Collection***

### **Insufficient Law Enforcement Training Resources**

The Montgomery County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) is the largest law enforcement agency in Montgomery County and is a major provider of law enforcement training in the region. The MCSO's Clint Peoples Regional Training Academy provides annual training for approximately 4,000 peace officers, judges, prosecutors, probation officers, and other criminal justice practitioners. The number of trained persons increases substantially each year. The training schedule includes Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) mandated courses and in service courses to develop everyday skills and obtain certifications for Peace Officers, Tele communicators and Jailers. Some of the courses of study are Use of Force, Child Abuse Investigation, Arrest/Search/Seizure, Mental Health Officer, Family Violence Investigation, Sexual Assault Investigation, and Cultural Diversity. Training also covers specialized subject matter (Gang Recognition and Control, Handling, Abnormal Personalities (PTSD), Stress Management, OC spray, Taser, Expandable Baton, etc.) The training academy staff also develops training courses to prepare officers to handle trends identified through observation and research. Many of these courses are staff developed and created as on-line courses. This creates a burden on staffing hours and expenditures but allows access to even more law enforcement personnel. In 2016 an additional 527 persons from outside agencies utilized the online training for 207 training hours and 12,719 contact hours. In 2017 an additional 726 persons from outside agencies utilized the online training for 236 training hours and 16,783 contact hours (January – September).

While the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office Training Academy provides training to other police agencies, each agency has similar problems with insufficient training resources, including the MCSO Academy. The academy has 4 full-time instructors and 40 adjunct instructors. In 2016, they completed 2,071 training hours of instruction, resulting in 33,829 contact hours. So far in 2017, 1,265.5 hours of training has been completed, resulting in 23,494 contact hours. More full time instructors are needed to address the requests for training classes being received by the academy, such as emergency driving to prevent fleet accidents and save lives, community policing instruction, leadership training, report writing, crisis intervention techniques, verbal

# Law Enforcement Issues—

Listed in priority order

## **Identified Problem**

## **Data Collection**

Insufficient Law Enforcement Training Resources (continued)

de-escalation and officer wellness programs for all officers. The state regulating agency - TCOLE adds addition curriculum each legislative session to be taught. 2017 has seen an addition of 13 more mandated classes to be added in the next two years. This is in addition to basic and in-service courses needed by a growing number of officers in the various agencies and as new officers are hired to meet the increasing service demands in this fast-growing county. To counter the increased need for officers the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office has developed a full time paid Basic Peace Officer Course. To maintain this 5 month course it takes the continuous work of all 4 full time instructors and the help of adjunct instruction to maintain. This is accomplished in between teaching the in-service classes the existing officers need. The Cadets also occupy, full time, one of only two training classrooms available.

### **Identified Needs:**

- Discussions of training needs have confirmed that the training courses noted above are still needed. However, there are also other topics needed by law enforcement officers in the county.
- Additionally, some of the reoccurring mandated topics are Spanish for Law Enforcement, Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Canine Encounters.
- Training space is at a premium due to community open training and events such as child safety seat events, citizen's police academies and RAD training (Rape Aggression Defense).
- A third training need identified is to teach the Basic Corrections Course in the Academy as opposed to hiring an outside vendor. This training is state mandated for all Detention Officers within one year of employment.
- Additional jail specific training rooms are needed for practical cell extractions, restraint chair training and safety practices. The amount fiscally saved annually would be proportionate to what is spent to outside vendors.
- Additional personnel would be needed to accomplish this task along with additional infrastructure.

### **Solution:**

- To continue in-service courses and the increased demands by TCOLE;
- To support specialized training in a variety of needs such as verbal de-escalation skills, encountering the mentally ill, patrol tactics which require the useful tools of training simulators used to enhance judgment and decision-making in high-risk activities. This support ultimately will keep officers and the public safe from injury or death.
- Add additional full time instructors and supervisors at the MCSO Training Academy to meet the increasing training needs of growing agencies in the county.

# Law Enforcement Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem      Data Collection*

<b>Speeding</b>	<p>It is well known that the speed of a vehicle is the main determining factor for the appropriate following distance, reaction distance, and braking distance. Speed is also the primary determinant of the kinetic energy of a vehicle upon impact with another vehicle or object, and it is that energy that causes the forces that destroy vehicles and kill or maim the occupants. Peripheral vision diminishes as speed increases, reducing situational awareness.</p> <p>TxDOT data for the entire state for 2016 shows that failure to control speed was a contributing factor in 493 fatal crashes, speeding over the speed limit was a contributing factor in 263 fatal crashes, and traveling at an unsafe speed was a contributing factor in 406 fatal crashes. In Montgomery County, 10 fatal crashes were speed was the primary factor and 551 total crashes.</p> <p>The county roadways include state highways, an interstate highway, farm-to-market roads, city streets, and county roads. Construction is almost always present throughout the county. Some roads were not built for the speeds common today, while newer roadways in such good condition provide a real temptation to drive over the speed limit. Traffic volume hampers efforts to safely enforce speed laws, at times allowing motorists to drive 20 to 30 miles over the speed limit without worry of being held accountable.</p> <p>All law enforcement agencies in Montgomery County have worked to bolster enforcement and some have used TxDOT STEP-Wave funds to enhance enforcement during holidays and other periods throughout the year. While effective in some respects compliance rates on most roadways remain very low.</p> <p>Speed compliance percentages 2017:</p> <p>FM1488 – 15.3%</p> <p>FM 1314 – 22.6 %</p> <p>Honea Egypt/Fish Creek – 16.7 %</p> <p>Walden Rd/La Torretta Blvd. - 11.1%</p> <p>SH 105 – 32 %</p> <p>SH 242 – 10 %</p> <p>IH 45 SB – 21.3 %</p> <p>IH Service Road SB – 23.3%</p> <p>IH 69 All lanes-36.6%</p> <p>Flintridge Drive-23.3%</p> <p>Woodlands Parkway-24.6%</p> <p>*Data from Sheriff’s Office STEP Program FY17</p>
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# Law Enforcement Issues—

Listed in priority order

## ***Solution:***

- Enforcement of traffic laws has a deterrent effect upon the motoring public. Efforts must be made to safely increase enforcement efforts and visibility, especially during periods of high traffic volume. Engineering solutions must also be sought in areas that have a history of crashes due to speed, and efforts must be made to reduce traffic congestion that then causes people to feel as if they must drive too fast to arrive on time. Effective education programs for the general public and traffic violators must be developed and implemented to change poor driving behavior, especially for the 15-24 year old age group who were involved in over 44% of the speed-related crashes, although they comprise less than 15% of the population. New methods, techniques, supplies, and equipment that can improve casualty care treatment and transportation to reduce mortality in crashes should be pursued. Vehicle design improvements to further protect occupants in high-speed collisions would be helpful as well.

## ***Identified Problem      Data Collection***

### **Narcotics**

**Marijuana** - There has been a significant decrease in both indoor and outdoor marijuana growing operations. The outdoor grows are usually located on absentee owners property or on National or State Forrest property. The plants are watered by a series of hoses and pumps ran by portable generators from a nearby water source. The indoor grows are located in rental houses where electricity is circumvented to run the numerous lights and ballasts and other items used in the process.

These houses will have extensive damage from the illegal operation which leaves the owner with several thousand dollars of repairs. Hydro or Indoor grown marijuana is still prevalent in the more affluent parts of the county whereas Mexican National marijuana can be found in all areas of the community. The Montgomery County Sheriff's Office is working closely with State and Federal Law Enforcement agencies to investigate these issues.

**Cocaine** - Cocaine and Crack cocaine are still prevalent in our community. The price of cocaine in the Greater Houston area to an average of 28,000.00 a Kilogram. The Greater Houston area is a source city for cocaine that is distributed across the nation. The Montgomery County Special Investigations Unit (SIU) works closely with Federal Agencies to disrupt and dismantle these type of organizations within our community.

**Prescription Pills** - Abuse of prescription pills is still a major issue in our community. These are popular with teenagers and young adults as recreation drugs but are abused by all age groups. Houston has an abundance of "PAIN CLINICS" that prescribe Hydrocodone, Soma and Xanax which are the most prevalent of the abused medications. Recent legislation regarding "DOCTOR SHOPPING" has made visiting numerous clinics for the same ailment more difficult. These doctor shoppers sell their excess medications on the street. More legislation is expected with regards to the operators of the pain clinics.



# Law Enforcement Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

<p>Narcotics (continued)</p>	<p><b><u>Heroin</u></b>- The SIU has seen a significant increase in street level use of Heroin. Houston is the source city for this drug. The abusers of heroin switched from abusing pain pills due to heroin availability.</p> <p><b><u>Methamphetamine</u></b>- Methamphetamine abuse is on the increase in our community. The manufacturing of this drug in our impact area has decreased over the past few years. The Mexican Drug Cartels are responsible for most of the methamphetamine in our area. SIU investigations have linked the Aryan Prison Gangs to the Mexican Prison gangs as the main traffickers of this drug on our community. These gangs have strong alliances in Prison and on the streets. The Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations use the Mexican Prison Gangs as the main distributors of the drugs. The Aryan Gangs then traffic the methamphetamine in our communities. These gangs would include but not be limited to the Aryan Brotherhood, Aryan Circle, Aryan Nation, Mexican Mafia, Texas Syndicate and the Houstone Tango Blast. The SIU works closely with State and Federal agencies with the investigation, disruption and dismantling of these groups.</p> <p><b><u>Designer Drugs</u></b> - We have not seen an increase in the use of this type drug. This would include ecstasy, GHB, and N-BOME. .</p> <p><b><u>Spice/Salts</u></b> - The community has seen the street level use of synthetic marijuana stay the same and the decline of abuse of bath salts. There is new legislation both state and federal to address the chemicals commonly found in these substances</p>
<p><b><i>Solution:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Montgomery County is a suburb community of Houston. Houston is a source and supply city for illegal drugs for most of the Nation. Our close proximity to Mexico and our extensive highway system makes the Greater Houston area, to include Montgomery County as an ideal distribution hub for the Cartels based in Mexico. The SIU Detectives and assisting agencies have identified, disrupted and dismantled several of these groups within our community. The Montgomery County Sheriff's Office SIU works closely with State and Federal Agencies to address this issue and has recently started a new task force with State, Local and Federal Agencies based at the Montgomery County International Airport. The SIU has a member assigned to the Houston HIDTA Major Drug Squads. SIU/Traffic deploys specially trained Patrol Deputies with five narcotic detector canines. This program has been tremendously successful with the disruption of drug trafficking in our community. The SIU employees attend specialized job specific training to better understand the current trends used by the trafficking organizations and the effective ways to investigate and disrupt these groups. This training is provided by both State and Federal Agencies.</li></ul>	

# Law Enforcement Issues—

Listed in priority order

## ***Identified Problem Data Collection***

<b>Preparation for Civil Disobedience Situations</b>	<p>Civil disobedience is the active refusal to obey certain laws, demands and commands of a government, or of an occupying power. It is one of the primary methods of nonviolent resistance, but can easily manifest itself into a dangerous situation. Managing crowds is one of the most important task law enforcement performs.</p> <p>Law enforcement agencies must be prepared to respond appropriately to a civil disobedience situation to insure the safety of all involved, as well as the rights of all involved. There has been assorted techniques and tools used by modern law enforcement to quell civil disturbances over the years, but a properly equipped force is a common denominator for any chance of success. Properly equipping and training a law enforcement response group is expensive.</p> <p>After any significant civil disturbance in which large-scale property damage, loss of life, or both occur, law enforcement agencies are held accountable. Clearly, law enforcement needs contemporary tools to help control these types of situations. The community as a whole and law enforcement will benefit by having available, properly equipped, trained and effective law enforcement to disperse crowds and/or make arrests during civil disobedience incidents.</p> <p>Contemporary assessments show that Montgomery County, Texas has areas of concern throughout the jurisdiction. Various state, national and world company headquarters are located within Montgomery County that could attract controversial attention.</p>
<b><i>Solution:</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To improve officer training and safety to reduce the risk of injury not only to the officers involved, but others as well by utilizing a safer alternative to conventional weapons in controlling dangerous or combative situations.</li><li>• To seek funding sources that would provide equipment and improve the effectiveness of units that have been trained to respond to civil disobedience situations with the purchase of new and/or replacement equipment.</li></ul>	

# Law Enforcement Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem    Data Collection*

There is a Lack of Specialized Investigative and Prosecutorial Units for Crimes Against Children, especially Child Abuse, Sexual Assault, and Adult Sexual Assault.

With the ever increasing population of Montgomery County, the rise in crimes against children, especially child sexual abuse and child sexual assault, was the foundation for the creation of the Children's Safe Harbor, the only specialized children's advocacy center in Montgomery County. Children's Safe Harbor has been accepting referrals from law enforcement agencies since 1998 to support the investigation of child sexual abuse and/or sexual assault through the service of forensic interviews. Specialized Children Protective Service units have been created during this same time period to facilitate joint investigations of child abuse in Montgomery County.

### **Crimes Against Children**

In October 2010 the District Attorney's Office assigned a prosecutor to Children's Safe Harbor to prosecute child sexual assault cases. That prosecutor worked closely with the four investigators, two from the Conroe Police Department, one from the Sheriff's Office, and one from the District Attorney's Office.

The law enforcement team at Children's Safe Harbor has continued to grow with a second prosecutor assigned to also handle only child sexual assault cases, another detective from the Sheriff's Office, and detectives from Constable Precinct #3 assigned to Children's Safe Harbor to investigate these cases full time.

Currently, the multi-agency team assigned to Children's Safe Harbor consists of:

#### District Attorney's Office:

- 2 full time child sexual assault prosecutors
- 1 child physical abuse prosecutor, 1 investigator
- 1 victim witness coordinator

#### Conroe Police Department:

- 2 Detectives

#### Constable's Precinct #3:

- 2 Detectives

#### Sheriff's Office:

- 3 Detectives

As more law enforcement personnel are assigned to investigate and prosecute these crimes, more of these crimes are able to be discovered. In 2010, Children's Safe Harbor personnel saw approximately 50-60 children a month. In October of 2017, they saw over 200 children. In 2016, Children's Safe Harbor Forensic Interviewers interviewed 986 children.

# Law Enforcement Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

There is a Lack of Specialized Investigative and Prosecutorial Units for Crimes Against Children, especially Child Abuse, Sexual Assault, and Adult Sexual Assault (continued)

### **Adult Sexual Assault**

The Montgomery County District Attorney's Office and the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office participate in the multi-Jurisdictional- Houston Police Department Human Trafficking Task Force unit also known as the Human Trafficking Rescue Alliance-Southern District of Texas. The Task Force's primary mission is Prevention-Protection-Partnership and Prosecution of those associated with Human Trafficking. The District Attorney's Office works with the Human Trafficking Rescue Alliance (HTRA) to combine resources with federal, state, and local enforcement agencies, as well as non-governmental service organizations including YMCA International to target human traffickers while providing necessary services to those that the traffickers victimized. Since its inception, HTRA has been recognized as a national model in identifying and assisting victims of human trafficking and prosecuting those engaged in trafficking offenses.

In 2015, the Montgomery County Coalition Against Human Trafficking was formed. This organization is a partnership of law enforcement agencies, prosecutors; non-governmental organizations that seek to eliminate Human Trafficking in Montgomery County, Texas. The Montgomery County Coalition Against Human Trafficking has quarterly meetings and provides trainings for its members. The primary objectives for the Montgomery County Coalition Against Human Trafficking are to establish and sustain effective human trafficking leadership that will marshal the resources necessary to support the successful identification of victims of all forms of human trafficking, ensure service delivery, and allow for the investigation and prosecution of trafficking perpetrators. Make data-driven decisions about human trafficking activities based on a shared understanding of the prevalence, scope, and nature of human trafficking within the target geographic area. Identify victims of all types of human trafficking through the use of coordinated training, public awareness and outreach efforts, and trauma-informed screening and interview techniques. Conduct proactive investigations of sex trafficking and labor trafficking with the goal of successful prosecution of human trafficking cases at the state or federal level, and to ensure that a comprehensive array of services are readily available to meet the individualized needs.

The Montgomery County District Attorney's Office is working with the Center for Court Innovation to implement an intervention court for human trafficking victims. The District Attorney's Office has developed a diversion program from prosecution for victims of human trafficking that have been charged with prostitution. This programs gives victims the opportunity to clear the charge from their criminal record by completing a yearlong program of monitoring and social services. The goal of the diversion program is to reintegrate victims of human trafficking back into society away from their former lifestyle.

# Law Enforcement Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

<p>There is a Lack of Specialized Investigative and Prosecutorial Units for Crimes Against Children, especially Child Abuse, Sexual Assault, and Adult Sexual Assault (continued)</p>	<p>In the Montgomery County District Attorney’s Office, the Internet Crimes Against Children Division (ICAC) has expanded to assign prosecutors dedicated to the prosecution of the exploitation of both children and adults as it relates to human trafficking. Over the last couple of years we have seen a strong nexus between the Internet and human trafficking. The specialized knowledge and training acquired by ICAC investigators and prosecutors aid in the fight against human exploitation.</p> <p>Over the last two years the Montgomery County District Attorney’s Office has filed more cases than we ever have for human trafficking related offenses. In a study published by the University of Texas this year, it estimates that there are 313,000 victims of human trafficking in Texas, approximately 79,000 child sex trafficking victims, and 234,000 victims of labor trafficking. In a nationwide study, Texas came in second place for most human trafficking cases reported. Over the past 6 years Texas has consistently been in the top two for most human trafficking cases.</p>
<p><b><i>Solution:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Continue to aggressively pursue offenders and put forth resources necessary to grow the specialized divisions.</li></ul>	

# Law Enforcement Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem    Data Collection*

<p>Community Training Needs for Domestic Violence Sexual Assault Prevention and Personal Protection</p>	<p>Law enforcement personnel have specialized training that can be shared with individuals within the community, i.e. self-defense, home security, driving techniques, abduction prevention, bullying, child abuse and neglect, and identity theft prevention. Personal protection training and techniques are requested training programs that police agencies receive.</p> <p>90 % of all students in grades 4-8 report being threatened and bullied in school. About 22% of students in grades 4-8 report academic difficulties as a result of peer abuse. 5.4 % of students nationwide report staying home at least one day a month because they fear for their safety. Every 7 minutes a child is bullied.</p> <p>58,000 children are abducted by non-family members. 117,200 children are missing from their caretakers. 85% of the time a child is abducted it involves the use of physical force.</p> <p>Public awareness activities and community outreach are a critical component of the Internet Crimes Against Children (“ICAC”) Division of the District Attorney’s Office. The ICAC program provides practical, relevant guidance to children, parents, educators, and others concerned with child safety. The ICAC Division does numerous presentations to schools, parents, and community groups to promote awareness and prevent child sexual abuse.</p> <p>Additionally, the District Attorney’s Office is working to develop community training for local high school and college students regarding Domestic Violence and violence between intimate partners. The highest rate of intimate partner violence, nearly triple the national average, is experienced by girls and women between the ages of 16 and 24. Young people need to be educated about dating violence, the cycle of violence, and statistics about victims of intimate partner abuse, as those who are abused at young ages will remain in abusive relationships into adulthood. Education and providing of resources to young people can help curb the cycle of abuse and empower them to foster healthy relationships and avoid becoming victims of domestic violence.</p>
<p><b><i>Solution:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The community as a whole can benefit from the expertise of its trained law enforcement. Methods and funding to provide training to citizens within the community should be sought to help instill confidence and self-improvement. Through training, individuals can become empowered and learn to replace the fear, confusion, and panic of dangerous situations with confidence, personal safety skills, and self-esteem.</li></ul>	

# Law Enforcement Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem    Data Collection*

<p>Criminal Issues as Associated with Homelessness. Offenses Include Theft, Assault, Trespassing, Intoxication Offenses, and Public Nuisance Crimes such as Public Urination, Public Defecation, Littering, Panhandling or Solicitation of Money, and Loitering Outside of Businesses</p>	<p>Regularly police officers are called to respond to an act of disorder or a crime perpetrated by a homeless individual. The caller isn't concerned about the status of the offender – he or she just wants the problem to go away. The police use various laws to either arrest the offender for a crime, or to get the person to leave the location. When the offender is released from jail, and is homeless, he or she may return to the location, resulting in an arrest for trespass. This circle of events recurs over and over again. Unfortunately, there is little data on which of these crimes or calls for service were due to a homeless individual.</p> <p>The extent of homelessness is relatively unknown. Every year HUD designates day on which to collect data on homelessness. The point –in-time count (PIT) was taken in January 2017 by members and friends of the Montgomery County Homeless Coalition. According to the HUD report prepared by the Texas Homeless Network, the number of homeless in Montgomery County was 193. In January of 2015, that number was 534. The number of homeless in Montgomery County is likely much higher than the official number used by HUD, since the count is dependent upon locating homeless people and getting them to cooperate and provide information. A problem in assisting the homeless is the inability to classify the homeless and determine the cause or factors that are conducive to a particular person being homeless. Without knowing the causes, it is difficult to develop programs that will move those people out of the situation or assist them in getting housing and employment.</p> <p>Homeless people can be divided into two categories: situational homeless and chronic homeless. The situational homeless are those who are homeless because of a particular situation or series of events such as a loss of job, eviction, divorce or separation, or other financial hardship. This group is not usually a problem for law enforcement, and they just need some temporary assistance to get back on their feet again. The best response for law enforcement agencies is to be aware of the different agencies or programs that assist the homeless, such as the Salvation Army, The Women's Center, and Family Promise. Each program has different guidelines for assistance. Some programs may only take men while others will only take mothers with small children but not allow husbands, and others might not take anyone with a criminal record or substance abuse issues. There are very few places that will take families. There is a shortage of emergency shelters throughout the County.</p> <p>Chronic homeless are those who are homeless due to personal choice, substance abuse, and/or mental illness. In fact, The Heritage Foundation estimates that half of the chronically homeless suffer from untreated mental illness. The chronically homeless include those who are normally involved in the criminal conduct associated with homelessness. The chronic homeless frustrate business and can intimidate the general public. Law enforcement's response includes increased patrols, and zero tolerance enforcement of laws and ordinances, to remove offending homeless people from an area where people are complaining about their actions and gathering.</p>
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# Law Enforcement Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

<p>Criminal Issues as Associated with Homelessness. Offenses Include Theft, Assault, Trespassing, Intoxication Offenses, and Public Nuisance Crimes such as Public Urination, Public Defecation, Littering, Panhandling or Solicitation of Money, and Loitering Outside of Businesses (continued)</p>	<p>Cities can enact strict ordinances that deal with loitering, camping, panhandling, and littering. They can work with businesses and the general public to educate them about the problems associated with those types of activities.</p> <p>Additional data collection would be helpful to determine the true scope of the problem, and to help classify the homeless and identify those most amenable to assistance and self-sufficiency. Even though the number of homeless is reportedly less this year, the lack of permanent housing needs to be addressed before we can solve the homeless problem, and the issues in the community caused by that population. There have been improvements in the Houston area because of the work done by the Mayor's office to make more resources available to homeless advocates and by creating more permanent housing. In some cities, advocates have found funding to develop programs to reclaim abandoned hotels that provide housing for the chronically homeless to remove them from the streets. The challenge with such programs is maintaining the funding streams to make such projects sustainable over the long term, and to create support for a location when these people, even when housed, continue to engage in disorderly conduct and other criminals actions because it is how they behave due to low impulse control, mental illness, or being under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol.</p>
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### ***Solution:***

- Develop or create a will or bias for action to solve the issue of homelessness and its related problems for as many of the homeless as possible within the county;
- Develop more reliable tools to identify and classify homeless populations;
- Identify and obtain assistance of community stakeholders in developing long-term solutions to homelessness and the problems caused by segments of the homeless population;
- Increase temporary shelters for families who are homeless;
- Increase efforts and assistance to those who are situationally homeless to help them recover to a level of self-sufficiency as quickly as possible;
- Identify properties and develop revenue streams to rehabilitate them into permanent housing for chronically homeless people; and
- Identify and mitigate factors that contribute to homeless populations camping in a location, which may include new fencing, additional lighting, health code enforcement, etc.



# Law Enforcement Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem*    *Data Collection*

Mistrust between  
Portions of the  
Community and  
Law Enforcement

Montgomery County law enforcement recognizes that the partnership between the community and law enforcement is crucial in making Montgomery County safer and more secure. For law enforcement to be successful and effective in their mission here in Montgomery County, law enforcement entities need the active support and assistance of its citizens and communities. Recent events in our nation and national trends have demonstrated a portion of the public has a perception of mistrust of law enforcement, lack lawfulness and legitimacy of law enforcement. This distrust, combined with a misunderstanding of law enforcement roles involving interactions with the public, can undermine the legitimacy of law enforcement. While the community here in Montgomery County has demonstrated tremendous support of the law enforcement role here in Montgomery County, and law enforcement has several successful projects in operation to improve relationships between law enforcement and the community, we need to recognize that there is a portion of the community that does not trust and recognize law enforcement here as legitimate and lawful.

Montgomery County law enforcement and government officials need to continue to develop trust and cross barriers in communication with the community that they serve. This is especially important in portions of the community that perceives law enforcement as mistrustful, unlawful, or illegitimate. Montgomery County law enforcement and government officials need to continue to develop trust and cross barriers in communication with the community that they serve. This is especially important in portions of the community that perceives law enforcement as mistrustful, unlawful, or illegitimate. Montgomery County law enforcement also recognizes that there is a need to cooperate in this effort with state and federal agencies to effect successful policies and practices to communicate and educate both law enforcement and the community in these efforts, and that these efforts cannot be solved by law enforcement alone.

### ***Solution:***

- Produce polices, programs to improve communication between law enforcement and the community, and plans to dismantle mistrust between portions of the community and law enforcement here in Montgomery County.

# Law Enforcement Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

<p>Countywide Integrated Criminal Justice Information System (CICJIS)</p>	<p>The rising population and continued growth has strained the criminal justice system in Montgomery County, which is the 6th fastest growing county in the state of Texas. The number of arrests being made and the number of cases being filed have increased to the point that the sheriff's office has made requests of agencies to use citations in lieu of arrests where possible. The district attorney's office has instituted a 24-hour intake system to try to screen cases early in an effort to more efficiently use resources. Criminals operate without regard to jurisdictional boundaries. Quite often officers arrest, or come into contact with, persons who reside in other jurisdictions in the county. These contacts and arrests are not known by officers from the offenders' home jurisdictions because each of the 28 law enforcement agencies in the county has its own records management system. Moreover, the various courts, probation department, and juvenile probation department all have their own systems.</p> <p>Three problems arise from these circumstances:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>(1) Information known to one agency that could generate leads in criminal cases is not easily shared with other agencies in the county;</li><li>(2) The true extent of an offender's conduct is not readily available to law enforcement agencies, courts, or community supervision; and</li><li>(3) There is much effort expended in the duplication about offenders' information, which is inefficient and prone to inaccuracies caused by human error.</li></ol>
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# Law Enforcement Issues—

Listed in priority order

## ***Solution:***

- An information system needs to be established for all of the criminal justice agencies in the county – police, constables, sheriff’s department, probation department, juvenile probation department, municipal courts, JP courts, and county and district courts. Information from traffic stops or reports should be viewable by all participants (with some exceptions for sensitive investigations). At the time of arrest and booking, the offender would automatically be assigned to a court with his information already listed in the docket. Such a system would automate as much of the process as possible, increasing efficiency. Employees could then use their time more effectively.

Therefore, we need to:

- Identify a product that can fulfill what is envisioned;
- Test the product;
- Identify a funding source to assist all agencies with assessments, testing, evaluation, purchase, training, and implementation of the new system.

# Mental Health Issues/Re-Entry Issues



# Mental Health/Re-Entry Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

<p>Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment for East Montgomery County</p>	<p>The East County areas, particularly Porter, New Caney and Cut and Shoot areas have seen considerable growth in population, especially with economically disadvantaged and ethnically diverse populations. This area has seen significant growth, up 25.3% since 2010, and projected to grow another 9.2% in the next 5 years.<sup>1</sup> This area is designated by the Public Health Service Act as a medically underserved area (MUA) and Health Professional Shortage Area, which documents the lack of primary care physician as well as the lack of mental health services.<sup>2</sup> The primary source of mental health and substance abuse services for those with Medicaid or no healthcare insurance is Tri-County Behavioral Healthcare located in Conroe.<sup>2</sup> In 2017, Tri-County exceeded adult capacity services by 18% and children and adolescent capacity services by 29%. In 2014, 22% of all child and adolescent services for Tri County were from the East County area and 18% of those receiving mental health and/or substance abuse services with Montgomery County Juvenile Probation originated from the East County area. County Health rankings identifies residents within Montgomery County as reporting that they exceed Texas in reported poor mental health days by 15%. This report also identifies Montgomery County as being slightly higher than Texas in reported excessive drinking.<sup>3</sup> TxDOT data for 2016 identifies Montgomery County as one of the top nine counties in Texas for DWI involved crashes.<sup>3</sup> While it is difficult to identify substance use and mental health needs by area of within the county, it is notable that there are no substance abuse treatment services in the East County area, and extremely limited mental health services. Lone Star, located in Conroe, is the only other provider to those with public insurance or no insurance. They provide limited psychiatric and counseling services, but do not provide any substance abuse treatment services. The SAMHSA treatment locator did not identify any mental health or substance abuse services within the East County area. The Psychology Today treatment locator only identified 3 master's level mental health providers for counseling services. Tri County's network of care listing services there are no public transportation services in the East County area; which means that individuals must travel to Conroe, Kingwood or The Woodlands for services, in excess of 30 minutes.</p> <p>There is a lack of treatment and prevention services in the county. Only Tri-County Services has consistently provided outpatient services to Medicaid or uninsured adults, youth and youth with Medicaid or CHIPs; however this program is largely dependent on local and state funding with no guarantee of future funding. Also, this program's funding does not fully cover needed outreach, sober activities, aftercare, and 12-step support groups.</p>
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# Mental Health/Re-Entry Issues—

Listed in priority order

## ***Solution:***

- Outpatient mental health and substance abuse treatment services that meet the needs of the East County residents where they live are needed.
- Transportation assistance is needed to facilitate access to services.
- Collaboration with local agencies, including churches in the East County area is needed to provide necessary outreach to those needing services.
- Tri-County Services' current outpatient treatment program for uninsured youth and youth with Medicaid or CHIPs is largely dependent on local and state funding with no guarantee of future funding; a long-term and more expansive funding source is needed,
- Evidenced-based prevention services need to be implemented in all services that are publicly funded.
- More schools need to allow agencies with evidence-based Prevention Services to offer services in the schools as youth and families often lack the transportation and afterschool resources for participation in such services.
- Collaborate with local area universities to train new mental health practitioners in a internship setting.
- Begin to form a Prevention Services provider meeting to discuss the needs and ways to improve the existing infrastructure with evidenced based practices and collaborations to secure needed funding

## **References:**

1. <http://www.emctx.com/eco-dev/demographic-studies>
2. Montgomery County United Way Health Assessment, 2011.
3. [http://ftp.dot.state.tx.us/pub/txdot-info/trf/crash\\_statistics/2015/39.pdf](http://ftp.dot.state.tx.us/pub/txdot-info/trf/crash_statistics/2015/39.pdf)
4. <http://www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/forms-publications/drivers-vehicles/publications/annual-summary.html>

## ***Identified Problem Data Collection***

<b>Dual Diagnosis Treatment Mental Health/Substance Use</b>	According to a recent article in the Montgomery County Community Impact, The District Attorney's office stated that, 60-70% of all crimes committed in Montgomery County are related to substance abuse. Additionally, 180 of the fatal crashes occurring between 2010 and 2016 were attributed to drug use <sup>1</sup> . In our community alcohol, methamphetamines, marijuana, and synthetic drugs are actively used, costing taxpayers through recurrent emergency room visits, hospitalizations, and criminal justice involvement. It has been noted that a person with substance abuse has twice the healthcare costs of someone without substance use history <sup>1</sup> . Despite these statistics, appropriate treatment for substance use and co-morbid mental health needs are limited with only one identified indigent outpatient provider, and no opportunities for inpatient residential or detoxification facilities.
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# Mental Health/Re-Entry Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

<p>Dual Diagnosis Treatment Mental Health/Substance Use (continued)</p>	<p>Tri-County Behavioral Healthcare has an Adult intensive outpatient substance abuse treatment program that utilizes evidenced-based practices, such as the Matrix curriculum and Motivational Interviewing. All treatment services are provided by Licensed Chemical Dependency Counselors (LCDCs) in a clinical setting with staff trained in the provision of services for those with a co-occurring mental health and substance use need. This treatment is delivered in both group and individual formats with availability for evening group to open access to individuals who are employed.</p> <p>The Substance Abuse Treatment Program at Tri-County is one of the few low-cost, indigent programs available in the Montgomery County service area with the next closest indigent service provider located in Houston, which is 36 miles from the center of Conroe. As transportation is a growing concern in the community, many have difficulty or are unable to access substance abuse treatment creating a negative impact on the fight against substance use. Further, Tri-County is the only provider of Co-Occurring Psychiatric and Substance Use Disorder treatment in Montgomery County.</p> <p>Unfortunately, there are limited options for low cost substance use treatment in Montgomery County creating the need for additional systems to emerge to address the growing need for services.</p>
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### ***Solution:***

- Obtain resources for affordable inpatient substance abuse treatment/detoxification for the medically indigent.
- Increase availability of transportation to and from inpatient and detox facilities in Houston.
- Increase community collaboration and awareness of the connection between substance use and mental illness to promote recognition of substance use as a chronic disease and reduce stigma.
- Increase availability of outpatient treatment options with greater focus on COPSD services.

### ***\*References:***

Zedaker, H. (2017, June). Officials: Substance Abuse Rising in Montgomery County. *Community Impact Newspaper*. Retrieved from newspaper homepage [www.communityimpact.com](http://www.communityimpact.com)

# Mental Health/Re-Entry Issues—

Listed in priority order

## **Identified Problem    Data Collection**

<p>Consistent Medication Treatment for Individuals with Mental Illnesses.</p>	<p><b>Consistent Medical and Psychiatric Care</b> Each local county jail, TDCJ, Local Mental Health Authority (LMHA) and State Hospital operate with different formularies for prescribing medications for medical and psychiatric services. More individuals could be assisted with improvement in psychiatric functioning with the use of those medications that can be confirmed as prescribed. Medications should follow the Health and Human Services' formulary while incarcerated in the Criminal Justice system making the formulary the same as medications used state hospitals or used for those enrolled in outpatient treatment through the LMHA.</p> <p>Montgomery County Jail booked in a total of 18,921 individuals from September 1, 2016 through August 31, 2017 with an average monthly census of 930, making it the 14 largest jail in the state of Texas. The Bureau of Justice Statistics in their report issued in June, 2017 noted that 26% of jail inmates met criteria for serious psychological distress in the past 30 days with 31% of those individuals reporting a major depressive disorder. In addition 44% reported that they had been told by a mental health professional in the past that they had a mental health disorder. However in the Montgomery County Jail, the percentage of individuals requiring treatment with psychotropic medication averaged 48.6% in the most recent quarterly data. In Montgomery County, that equates to an average of 452 individuals each month needing mental health services.</p> <p>The National Commission on Correctional Health Care noted in their Explanation of Standards that continuity of care is an important concept as it helps to prevent adverse patient outcomes. For instance, it may not be possible to maintain a therapeutic dose of medication unless medications are taken as prescribed. Inordinate delays in receiving clinically indicated prescription medication may result in significant morbidity or mortality. Adverse patient outcomes can also occur when there are frequent changes in medication orders, medication histories are not reviewed by the clinician or treating clinicians are unaware of each other's prescribing practices. The importance of individuals continuing to take medication as prescribed for health conditions such as high blood pressure or diabetes is for the most part a universally accepted idea. There are also many other prescription medications that could have adverse health consequences if abruptly discontinued or not taken in a timely manner; steroids, antidepressants, antibiotics, and others require strict regimens in order to remain effective or prevent side effects. This is especially true for psychotropic medications. Bowen <i>et. al</i> (2009) in their study noted that the continuity of mental health care is undermined by the removal or alteration of existing medication practices and changes on admission to jail which can serve to exacerbate the inmate's anxiety and sense of helplessness. Changes in medication appear to contribute to poor relationships with health staff, disrupt an established medication practice, which discourages inmates from taking responsibility for their own conditions and detrimentally affects the mental health of inmates when they are the most vulnerable.</p>
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# Mental Health/Re-Entry Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

<p>Consistent Medication Treatment for Individuals with Mental Illnesses (continued)</p>	<p>Continuity of care is considered fundamental to high quality care. Treatment discontinuity has the potential to affect both recidivism and health care costs on release. Ensuring continuity of medications can assist in both the continuity of care provision and the continuity of care experience during any incarceration. It has been shown to decrease the probability of individuals becoming more debilitated by illness especially psychiatric illnesses and when combined with coordinated service less likely to return to jail once they are released, thus lowering both the costs and the number of people whose primary treatment location is the jail.</p>
<p><b>Solution:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accept and use the Health and Human Services Statewide formulary for Individuals being incarcerated in the Montgomery County Jail who are booked in from the community, TDCJ, or returning from the state hospitals for continuity of care purposes. Ensure continuity with established effective medication regimes in order to decrease the probability of relapse in mental health symptoms due to changing or going without medications as a result of transitions between locations and services.</li> </ul> <p>References:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="https://www.ncchc.org/spotlight-on-the-standards-23-2">https://www.ncchc.org/spotlight-on-the-standards-23-2</a></li> <li>Montgomery County Sheriff’s Office</li> <li>Southwest Correctional Medical Group</li> <li>Medication Management and Practices <a href="https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2770990/">https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2770990/</a></li> <li>Continuity of Medication Management and Continuity of Care <a href="https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4607236/">https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4607236/</a></li> </ol>	

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

<p>Peer Specialist Services in the Mental Health Treatment Court and Montgomery County Jail</p>	<p>Montgomery County is the 11<sup>th</sup> most populated county out of 254 Counties in the State of Texas with a population estimated at 556,203 according to United States Census Bureau Texas census demographics. Montgomery County Jail booked in a total of 18,921 individuals from September 1, 2016 through August 31, 2017 with an average monthly census of 930, making it the 14 largest jail in the state of Texas. The Bureau of Justice Statistics in their report issued in June, 2017 noted that 26% of jail inmates met criteria for serious psychological distress in the past 30 days with 31% of those individuals reporting a major depressive disorder. In addition 44% reported that they had been told by a mental health professional in the past that they had a mental health disorder. However in the Montgomery County Jail, the percentage of individuals requiring treatment with psychotropic medication averaged 48.6% in the most recent quarterly data. In Montgomery County, that equates to an average of 452 individuals each month needing mental health services.</p>
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# Mental Health/Re-Entry Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem    Data Collection*

<p>Peer Specialist Services in the Mental Health Treatment Court and Montgomery County Jail (continued)</p>	<p>Many of these individuals can be assessed and diverted prior to incarceration through the services of the Mental Health Treatment Court which provides services for 12-24 months sentences, depending on whether the offense is a misdemeanor or felony.</p> <p>The Montgomery County Mental Health Treatment Court (MCMHTC) has been serving 20 participants in the criminal justice diversion program since its beginning on August 25, 2016. This number is expected to grow to 60 by the end of the current fiscal year. The staff of 7 provides coordinated specialty mental health care and supportive services to help participants meet their court-ordered treatment goals. However there are currently no peer supports available to expand the treatment options available. The MCMHTC personnel individualize a person centered plan which includes care management to help coordinate behavioral health services with health care and medication management, as well as services related to housing, employment, family education. The missing link is customized recovery support offered by an individual with the lived experience contributes to a life that sustains recovery.</p> <p>Peer support and social inclusion models have demonstrated success in facilitating recovery and reducing health care costs. The role of the peer support worker has been defined as “offering and receiving help, based on shared understanding, respect and mutual empowerment between people in similar situations. Peer support workers are able to engage in a wide range of activities, including advocacy, linkage to resources, sharing of experience, community and relationship building, group facilitation, skill building, mentoring, goal setting, and more. They may also plan and develop groups services or activities, provide training, gather information on resources, educate the public and policymakers, and work to raise awareness. The importance and validation of these services are based on delivery of services by people who have experienced mental health and/or substance use disorders and are in recovery themselves. A Certified Peer Specialist is an educated and licensed professional with the lived experience and recovery who also serves as a key element in the professional delivery of mental health services.</p> <p>The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA) Recovery Community Services Program (RCSP) research has shown that peer support facilitates recovery, reduces health care costs and recognizes that peer mentoring or coaching develops a one-on-one relationship in which a peer leader with recovery experience encourages, motivates, and supports a peer in recovery. These services advance recovery and help prevent relapse and promote sustained recovery from mental and/or substance use disorders.</p>
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# Mental Health/Re-Entry Issues—

Listed in priority order

## ***Solution:***

- Hire a Certified Peer Specialist to provide additional group and case management services to jail inmates and support for those persons assigned to the Mental Health Treatment Court. Services would include but not be limited to peer-to-peer counseling, housing and community attachment, and employment supports to meet the increase in participants in the jail diversion programs.

## **\*References:**

1. <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045216>
2. Montgomery County Sherriff's office
3. <https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/adolescent-development/mental-health/how-adults-can-support-adolescent-mental-health/index.html>
4. <https://www.samhsa.gov/recovery/peer-support-social-inclusion>
5. [https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs\\_campaigns/brss\\_tac/core-competencies.pdf](https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/brss_tac/core-competencies.pdf)
6. [https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/imhprjil112\\_sum.pdf](https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/imhprjil112_sum.pdf)
7. Mead, S., Hilton, D. & Curtis, L. (2001). Peer support: A theoretical perspective. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 25(2), 134-141.

## ***Identified Problem    Data Collection***

<b>Chronic Homelessness and Barriers to Housing Stability</b>	<p>According to the 2017 Point-In-Time (PIT) count of sheltered and unsheltered persons in Montgomery County area, .035% of the total population met criteria for homelessness, which was defined as staying in emergency shelter, transitional housing, or safe haven with beds dedicated for homeless persons or those persons who are staying in a place not meant for human habitation. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, in no state can a minimum wage worker afford a two bedroom apartment unit at Fair Market Rent. In the state of Texas they would need to work 71-88 hours per week to be able to afford basic rent of and \$850 a month apartment. Of those, it is estimated that 25-50% have a history of legal involvement and that 5% of all adults to enter shelters annually are coming from correctional facilities<sup>2</sup>. Further, many communities are adopting policies that criminalize behaviors associated with homelessness, such as sleeping outdoors, eating, sitting, or panhandling in public spaces, thereby perpetuating the cycle of criminal justice involvement and recidivism. When individuals are arrested for offenses related to such activities, they develop a criminal record that makes it more difficult to obtain employment or housing that would lead toward self-sufficiency.</p> <p>Additionally, those experiencing chronic or temporary homelessness have limited options for addressing this situation given the limited access to supported or transitional housing opportunities, which tend to have limited availability and require that the person meets specific needs to qualify. If an individual has a criminal history, is registered as a sex</p>
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# Mental Health/Re-Entry Issues—

Listed in priority order

**Identified Problem    Data Collection**

<p>Chronic Homelessness and Barriers to Housing Stability (continued)</p>	<p>Unmet mental health and substance use needs also exacerbate difficulty in obtaining and maintaining housing. Finally, there are often multiple barriers to accessing necessary care including transportation to appointments, ability to comprehend questions on applications, and possession of necessary documentation to qualify for requested assistance for housing and other assistance that often individuals will give up before support can be awarded.</p> <p>Given the multiple barriers that exist in the homeless community that prevents access to affordable and safe housing and perpetuates the cycle of homelessness and recidivism, it is important for attention to be given to addressing the needs of this population. In doing so, it is predicted that the rate of criminal justice involvement, including time spent incarcerated and costs associated with legal activity will be reduced.</p>
<p><b>Solution:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transportation assistance to facilitate access to services.</li> <li>• Collaboration between agencies to review current processes and identify barriers to care that may be reduced or eliminated to promote greater access.</li> <li>• Discussion within the community to provide education on the identification of mental illness and substance use to promote a connection to appropriate services to provide treatment and case management to address needs.</li> <li>• Development of a process wherein individuals identified as chronically homeless are connected with assistance in navigating available options, completing paperwork, and addressing unmet needs.</li> </ul> <p>References:</p> <p><sup>1</sup>Montgomery County Homeless Coalition (2017). “2017 Homeless Count Montgomery County”. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.mctxhomeless.org/educate.html">http://www.mctxhomeless.org/educate.html</a></p> <p><sup>2</sup> United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (2016). “Reducing Criminal Justice System Involvement among People Experiencing Homelessness. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/reducing-criminal-justice-system-involvement-among-people-experiencing-homelessness">https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/reducing-criminal-justice-system-involvement-among-people-experiencing-homelessness</a></p>	

**Identified Problem    Data Collection**

<p>Need for Transportation Services in Montgomery County for the Mentally Ill Population</p>	<p>There are many residents without transportation means to achieve daily living. Daily living can be improved in many ways by providing low-cost transportation to and from the rural, outlying areas of the county. Transportation is a much needed service for the mentally ill population in Montgomery County. The county residents as a whole would benefit from a service, similar to what is currently in place for the City of Conroe a (city limits) residents. First, transportation services would be helpful to assist the mentally ill in rural Montgomery County to travel from home to their necessary treatment appointments, to look for work at the WorkSource center and to attend court hearings, if needed.</p>
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# Mental Health/Re-Entry Issues—

Listed in priority order

**Identified Problem    Data Collection**

<p>Need for Transportation Services in Montgomery County for the Mentally Ill Population (continued)</p>	<p>Defendants could have access to transportation, which would ensure that they report to probation appointments and court appearances. Second, transportation assistance would allow the mentally ill consumers and defendants to keep up with their recommended mental health treatment. Transportation to and from doctor appointments would give mentally ill consumers and defendants a sense of independence and accomplishment.</p> <p>Lastly, transportation to and from the city could possibly help lower the recidivism rates by allowing mentally ill defendants to meet all of their necessary requirements such as reporting to probation, completing CSR requirement and taking their drug tests, thus avoiding possible revocation for non-compliance. The outcome would be that persons with mental illness or other disabilities could have access to transportation services that would allow them to complete many other needed requirements in their lives.</p> <p>Currently, the City of Conroe has Conroe Connection, which is open to the general public for use during the week from 7 am- 7 pm, with a fare up to \$1.00 for a one-way trip anywhere in the town where there is an official bus stop. The City of Conroe provides bus rides free-of-charge for those individuals with disabilities that complete an application. This mode of transportation is provided to the public through a series of grant appropriations.</p> <p>The Woodlands Township has a trolley service that has a fixed route in the Waterway area. The trolley is open to the general public seven days a week from 11 am – 8 pm. There is no charge for this service.</p> <p>The Montgomery County Committee on Aging and Interfaith of The Woodlands has transportation services for the elderly in specific areas near The Woodlands during the week from 7:30 am – 3 pm, with no fee.</p> <p>New Danville has transportation taxi-like services to surrounding areas (Willis, Conroe, And The Woodlands) six days per week from 7:30 am – 6:30 pm for an \$8.00 charge round-trip.</p> <p>Brazos Transit District provides transportation to the general public for certain locations in Montgomery County during the week from 5:00 am – 7 pm, based on location.</p>
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# Mental Health/Re-Entry Issues—

Listed in priority order

## ***Solution:***

- Form a committee with key members/stakeholders to discuss Montgomery County's transportation issues and solutions
- Request new stops for the mentally ill and criminal justice involved persons who would benefit from stops centrally located near the courts, probation, DPS office, jail facilities, veteran's services and the local mental health authority
- Apply for offered grants needed to make affordable transportation services available in the rural areas
- Review costs for mentally ill persons to utilize transportation options that could possibly be covered by a grant for persons with disabilities or from donations in the community

## **References**

- <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/48339>
- <http://www.conroconnection.org>
- <http://www.yourconroenews.com/news/article/Montgomery-County-transportation-manager-position-9497868.php>

## ***Identified Problem    Data Collection***

### **Juvenile Detention Medical and Mental Health Care**

Montgomery County is now the 11<sup>th</sup> most populated county out of 254 counties in the state of Texas with a population estimated at 556,203 according to Texas census demographics<sup>1</sup>. Of those, 26.6% of residents are age 18 years and younger and 10.1% live in poverty<sup>1</sup>. Montgomery County Juvenile Detention center reports 738 individual occurrences of juvenile's being detained for at least 1+ nights with additional juvenile's being referred and then released the same day from June 2016 to June 2017<sup>2</sup>. Numerous estimates support the need for medical and mental health services to be provided at detention facilities for between 12% and 40% of juveniles. The average 25% required mental health treatment under criteria established by the State of Texas. In Montgomery County, that equates to 184.5 individuals during the past year who warrant detailed mental health assessment and treatment. Many of these juveniles should be assessed in detail and diverted prior to adjudication. Montgomery County Juvenile Detention has multiple LMFT, LPC, and LSOTP counselors who work for, or contract with, the facility for routine assessment and facilitation of crisis services throughout the week. Juveniles are assessed for, and removed from, suicide precautions by LPC and LMFT counselors after being identified by MAYSI examination. Although identification of individuals needing treatment has been established there is still some lack of medication treatment and psychiatric services while being detained.

# Mental Health/Re-Entry Issues—

Listed in priority order

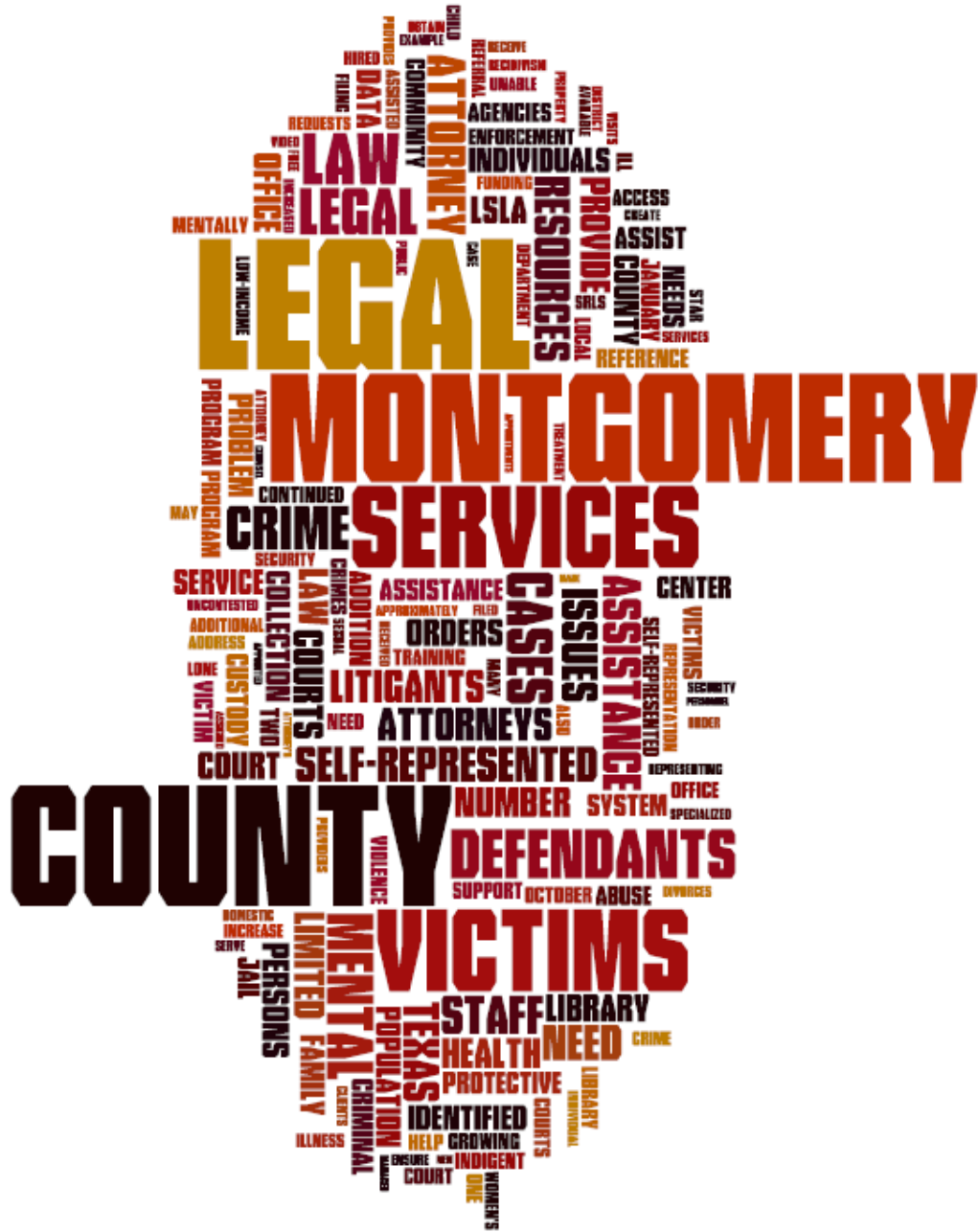
## ***Solution:***

- Increasing hours available for medical and mental health services to be provided, or hire a psychiatric nurse practitioner to do routine follow up on medications and free up initial psychiatrist time.

## **\*References**

- <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/montgomerycountytexas/PST045216>
- Montgomery County Juvenile Detention Office

# Court Issues





# Court Issues— Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem    Data Collection*

Need for Continued Operation of the Veterans Treatment Court, Covering Associated Costs

The mission of the Montgomery County Veterans Treatment Court is to assist veterans and their families to become integral and productive members of the community through a collaborative effort, to honor their service and to restore their dignity in recognition of their selfless service to their country. The Program offers treatment utilizing an interventionist approach to address the root causes leading to criminal activities in which a nexus is seen between their criminal behavior and their experiences in military service. To date, the Montgomery County Veterans Treatment Court has served 31 veterans, and that number is thought to be considerably lower than the actual number of veterans in the County that are targeted by the Court.

Fifty percent of all veterans live in only 10 of the 50 states; and, it is predicted by the VA that Texas will continue to have the largest number of veterans through the year 2037. One in five veterans have symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, or other mental health disorders or cognitive impairment. Without treatment, mental health issues will continue to get worse and lead to substance abuse, criminal behavior or suicide. The suicide rate among veterans is staggering; studies have shown there are 20 veteran suicides daily – and that number does not even consider Texas and California, the states with the largest veteran population. From January, 2016 through October, 2017, there were 1,320 veterans incarcerated in the Montgomery County Jail. That is 20% of the total Jail population. Those numbers supported the Jail’s designation of one Jail pod dedicated entirely to veterans. This has improved the ability of Montgomery County to identify and reach out to defense attorneys and veteran defendants to ensure their knowledge and access to the benefits of participation in the Court. Unresolved mental health problems generally result in inadequate self-treatment with substance abuse or produce inappropriate social responses, all of which are treatable with the resources available to the Veterans Treatment Court.

Out of 12 graduates from the Montgomery County Veterans Treatment Court to date, there has been no recidivism. While we cannot say for certain the treatment has cured the mental health issues leading a veteran to the Court, we can say with confidence that the services received in the Court Program provide the coping skills to enable a veteran to face the problems and traumas of daily life beyond the Court, in a productive way and with confidence. But, the cost of alcohol and drug screening necessary for the probation supervision of Court participants and the cost of private counseling services are not cheap. Veterans do not have the financial means to cover those costs. To require them to pay for those services, as well as the normal court and probation fees, there would be few who could afford to participate in the Court. Burdening the veterans and their families with financial restraints would effectively kill the program.

# Court Issues—

Listed in priority order

***Identified Problem***    ***Data Collection***

<p>Need for Continued Operation of the Veterans Treatment Court, Covering Associated Costs (continued)</p>	<p>The first goal is to ensure continuity of the Veterans Treatment Court through the provision of funds for office supplies and training necessary for Court staff. The second goal is funding of services for urine analysis necessary for alcohol and drug screening to ensure sobriety and compliance with the Court requirements. The third goal is the funding of specialized counseling that can be ordered by the Court on a case-by-case basis, as necessary to address individual needs. The counseling can be done in-patient or out-patient, depending on the severity of the symptoms or relapse that lead to the need for counseling outside of what is available through the VA.</p>
<p><b><i>Solution:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide funds for office supplies necessary for administration of the Veterans Treatment Court.</li><li>• Provide funds for training of the Court Staff.</li><li>• Provide funds to cover the cost of random urine analyses of all veteran participants in the Veterans Treatment Court.</li><li>• Provide funds to cover the cost of specialized mental health/trauma counseling deemed by the Court Treatment Team to be necessary to address mental health issues of Court participants, and to address relapses or setbacks of Court participants that jeopardize their ability to progress in the Program.</li></ul>	

# Court Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Problem Identified Data Collection*

<p>Need for System Wide Improvements to Handle Mentally Ill Defendants</p>	<p>Thirty to thirty-five percent of the Montgomery County jail population has documented mental health issues and approximately 225 persons per month are found in the TLETS CCQ match system, indicating that these defendants have received treatment from state and local mental health agencies in the past for mental health issues. New intake procedures allow the jail real time access to the TLETS CCQ system, and therefore the ability to identify defendants who have previously received treatment for a mental health issue. This resource has supplied Mental Health Services with information necessary to provide social referral services to defendants with mental health issues dealing with the criminal justice system in Montgomery County. Additionally, Tri-County Behavioral Healthcare has supplied a professional counselor in the jail to perform preliminary evaluations for use by the Magistrate in determining conditions of bond during probable cause. Adult Probation has two probation officers who oversee individuals on probation who have been ordered to attend Mental Health Treatment Court. All of these resources have somewhat improved the overall process for a handful of defendants with mental health issues in the criminal justice system, but has not improved the vast majority of those with qualifying diagnoses in the criminal justice system, nor overall coordination efforts between criminal justice actors, nor improved overall desired outcomes.</p> <p>An evaluation of the post-trial mental health docket in Montgomery County conducted by Sam Houston State University, noted that “additional efforts should be made to increase the number of offenders involved in this combined supervision/rehabilitation program.” With approximately 2,700 persons annually who are booked into the jail with identified mental health issues, the need for a viable program to address the specific needs of this particular cohort is apparent. Training is much needed for criminal justice actors, including Court Staff, Prosecutors, Defense Bar, Probation, Law Enforcement and others, as well as allocation of resources toward those ends.</p> <p>Along with treatment for those with mental health issues, procedural fairness is essential toward ensuring full and whole treatment of the individual in the justice system. In order to more accurately assess the needs and best outcomes for the individual with mental health issues in the criminal justice system, the courts need a viable diversion program, a mental health court program, in order to fulfill several important objects and goals. The first goal currently, is the need to meaningfully decrease the jail population. With the aforementioned number of mental health bookings going into the jail, Tri-County Behavioral Healthcare, has partnered with the Sheriff’s Office to provide evaluations in the jail that are used for probable cause. The current process for evaluation is in need of vast improvement. A master’s level student provides a preliminary evaluation on one day of the week, making recommendations to the psychiatrist, who then comes and performs evaluations on one day of the week, usually a week after the first</p>
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# Court Issues—

Listed in priority order

## *Identified Problem Data Collection*

<p>Need for system wide improvements to handle mentally ill defendants (continued)</p>	<p>evaluation. One psychiatrist is simply not enough for the percentage of people in the jail who need evaluating. While some of this population may qualify for personal recognizance bonds, those with mental health issues are still charged with a violation. SB 1326, passed during the 85<sup>th</sup> Session, creates a framework for evaluation of inmates at the county level, and provides a reporting structure for magistrates ordering the evaluations.</p> <p>Along with the goal of diversion from the jail, is use of TriCounty’s services in order to improve outcomes with individuals, as well as the wider community connected to those individuals. It is assumed that any treatment received by those in the criminal justice system, will aid in providing useful tools to family members and friends in the wider community, assisting in the overall goal of reduced recidivism in the county.</p> <p>A third and final outcome of a Mental Health Court program would be the potential growth of services geared toward those with mental health issues in Montgomery County. Currently, TriCounty Behavior Health Services is one of the very few that deals with this burgeoning issue in a growing area. The Mental Health Court will not only help qualify individuals for treatment, but qualify providers that can help to alleviate a problem that is only growing in Montgomery County.</p>
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### ***Solution:***

- Provide training not just for attorneys handling cases where defendants have a documented mental health diagnosis, but for criminal justice actors in the system including the Courts, Prosecutors, Law Enforcement, and Probation. Educating system stakeholders will not only create better business processes in the short term, but improve overall outcomes for mentally ill defendants in the long run, including improving public safety.
- Increase resources for TriCounty Behavioral Health Services and others to provide consistent and more numerous psychological assessments and more full evaluations at the Montgomery County Jail prior to probable cause, as well as evaluating those defendants who’ve qualified for bond for the purposes of placement in a mental health court docket.
- Provide funding for the Mental Health Court dedicated specifically to diverting those defendants with mental health issues to treatment providers as a condition of bond and/or probation.
- Provide access to training for implementation of the provisions of SB 1326 (85<sup>th</sup> Regular Session) as it relates to business process and reporting.

# Court Issues—

Listed in priority order

***Identified Problem***

***Data Collection***

<p><b>Insufficient Courtroom Security and Equipment</b></p>	<p>Montgomery County Courts consist of seven District Courts and five County Courts at Law. In addition to these twelve courts and elected judges, there are two Associate Judges in Montgomery County for family law cases, and an Associate Judge for Criminal and Civil cases. Child Protective Services and the Child Support Division of the Texas Attorney General have separate courts and judges.</p> <p>The seventeen courts are housed in four separate buildings, and there are metal detectors and Court Security (not law enforcement officers) at these locations. Court Security is responsible for the initial screening of all persons who enter these locations. County employees and local attorneys are allowed to bypass these metal detectors, and employees have access at other entry points with electronic keys.</p> <p>The Montgomery County Sheriff provides deputies to the courts in the county. The Sheriff’s office is responsible for transporting criminal defendants to these courtrooms. In addition, family law cases and ancillary proceedings, such as CPS and OAG cases, provide an often contentious environment that can escalate into security incidents, particularly when litigants are self- represented.</p> <p>In 2009, a Security Review and Analysis of Montgomery County Courts was performed and recommendations made to expand video surveillance, to staff Courthouse entrances until buildings are locked and members of the public are gone from the premises. The Review also recommended that law enforcement patrol the buildings to provide additional security.</p> <p>From January 1, 2012 to October 31, 2012, Montgomery County Courts had 7,977 inmates transported from the Montgomery County jail to courtrooms; 1,187 arrests were made in the courtrooms and 19,211 law enforcement hours logged.</p> <p>Access by the public to Court facilities provides another measure of the need for securitization. The Collections Department recorded 6,568 in person visits in CY16 and is projected to have 6,724 in person visits in CY17. There were 420 pro se family law bench trials or pro se pre-trial hearings in FY17.</p> <p>Between State FY 2010 and State FY 2013, 28 Court Security Incident Reports were reported to the state Office of Court Administration. The vast majority of these (26) were incidents in court, while 2 occurred outside of court, but in the courthouse complex. Two incidents in FY 2015 involved injury to an officer in the courtroom, while two incidents during that same year involved the presence of knives in the courtroom.</p> <p>The Texas Legislature has taken notice of this issue at the state level after the shooting of Judge Julie Kocurek outside her private residence in Austin. Since that time, SB 42 has been passed into law, mandating the creation of local Court Security Committees, creating a new training</p>
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# Court Issues—

Listed in priority order

***Identified Problem    Data Collection***

<p>Insufficient Courtroom Security and Equipment (continued)</p>	<p>fund, and created a Court Security framework through the Office of Court Administration. Problems continue to be vetted and considered at the local level.</p> <p>The Courthouse Security Fund is provided by fees assessed in criminal cases and upon filing of civil cases. Collections for FY 2016 total \$317,465. Commissioners Court allocated the cost of Court Security to this fund, and these expenditures exceeded the collections by \$54,010 in FY2016. Expenditures have exceeded collections consistently since FY 2012 and before.</p>
<p><b><i>Solution:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify funding for additional law enforcement and/or security personnel and for video or surveillance equipment, as well as specialized training for courtroom bailiffs (e.g. ALERRT training)</li> <li>• Provide a full time bailiff to CPS and Child Support Courts for resolving disputes and protecting the individuals conducting business in those courts.</li> <li>• Conduct a review of new courtrooms and public spaces for possible security threats, including development and implementation of possible solutions.</li> </ul>	

***Identified Problem    Data Collection***

<p>Need for Better Pretrial Defendant Information and Risk Assessment</p>	<p>Information follows defendants through the criminal justice system. These identifiers are essential in ensuring that law enforcement, the jail, the courts and other criminal justice actors are dealing with the correct person. Beyond these normal identifiers are several meaningful pieces of information that can assist magistrates in the decision on whether or not to incarcerate the defendant. In Montgomery County magistration occurs within 24 hours. Typically the only information available to the magistrate, aside from basic identifiers, is the offense report. Booking information is completed for usually only a handful of defendants that come to magistration.</p> <p>Increased emphasis on pretrial justice in the past two years at the state and national level have highlighted the importance of addressing the continuous negative effects of incarceration on low risk offenders. Nationally, the Laura and John Arnold Foundation have recently pledged substantial financial support to the development and study of a scientifically valid risk assessment model for the criminal justice system. The product, implemented state-wide in Kentucky and other jurisdictions has shown promise, not only in accurately determining risk of failure to appear and/or reoffending, but also in contributing to a measurable decrease in overall crime.</p>
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# Court Issues—

## Listed in priority order

***Identified Problem      Data Collection***

<p><b>Need for Better Pretrial Defendant Information and Risk Assessment (continued)</b></p>	<p>In Texas, the Supreme Court of Texas has organized a Criminal Justice Committee, which is charged with “assessing the impact of pretrial criminal justice statutes and policies” as well as “[identifying] judicial policies or initiatives that could be enacted to...enhance public safety and social outcomes when making pretrial confinement decisions.” Attention continues to be drawn to the front end of the criminal justice system, and how stakeholders assess the offense and flight risks associated with a defendant.</p> <p>Montgomery County has historically relied on cash bail solely as a means of pretrial release. Discretion exists for no bail, but is usually reserved for the most extraordinary offenses. In order to make better informed decisions on bail for defendants, judicial officers would benefit from more evidence-based practices regarding data collection and scientifically validated risk assessments regarding pretrial release. This information, while crucial to judges, would also be of great benefit to Prosecutors, Defense Attorneys, Law Enforcement, Probation and practically every other criminal justice system actor.</p>
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***Solution:***

- An increase in the number of personnel gathering defendant data in the Montgomery County Jail prior to magistration. These personnel would interview defendants who have been arrested and provide a report to the magistrate, reviewing in detail the defendant’s risk for re-offense and failing to appear at first or subsequent court dates
- Implement a Community Corrections Service Center (CCSC) that implements evidence based practices. The CCSC will serve defendants both pre and post-conviction. The CCSC will assign staff to the jail and administer a validated risk assessment instrument on all instanter arrest. The staff will assign a risk level available to magistrate to assist in determining type and bond amount. The goal will be to expedite the release of low risk offenders from jail. A condition of the bond will include participation in the CCSC. The program will provide case management, supervision, drug and alcohol testing. Additionally, if the need for counseling is identified, the CCSC will provide the appropriate counseling services. The CCSC will be a division within the Adult Probation department and work collaboratively with all applicable agencies
- Purchase, implementation and utilization of a scientifically validated pretrial risk assessment for use in interviewing defendants upon being brought into the Montgomery County Jail and prior to magistration
- Training staff in conducting of the interviews, as well as use of the report by the judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, court staff, law enforcement, probation and all other criminal justice system actors

# Veteran's Issues





# Veterans Issues— Listed in priority order

***Identified Problem***

***Data Collection***

<p><b>Lack of Transitional Assistance for Veterans Leaving the Montgomery County Jail</b></p>	<p>According to a report published by the Housing Assistance Council in 2015 from collected data based on the Census Bureau’s 2009-1013 American Community Survey, there are 1,583,272 Veterans that live in Texas. With high reliability, there are approximately 32,099 in Montgomery County.</p> <p>Out of the 32k+ Veterans in Montgomery County, with high reliability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 4,836 Veterans who have a service connected disability.</li> <li>- 1,581 Veterans living below the poverty level estimate</li> <li>- 2,464 Veterans who are unemployed</li> <li>- 1,779 Veterans who have less than a high school graduate certificate</li> </ul> <p>There are approximately 1200 people incarcerated in the Montgomery County jail on any given day. Number fluctuates often due to release, transfer, or additions. Approximately 10% of the Jail population are Veterans. A high percentage of those Veterans could have access to VA benefits or other services if they were made aware of opportunities and there are five plus agencies providing supportive services for Veterans in Montgomery County who are willing to provide services in the jail.</p>
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***Solution:***

- Implementation of a reentry dorm within the jail specifically to house Veterans. Within this dorm, Veterans will be housed together and will be given access to transitional assistance. To include: VA medical care, VA benefit information, family assistance, financial assistance, housing assistance, employment assistance, etc.

***Identified Problem Data Collection***

<p><b>Lack of Housing Opportunities for Veterans who Have Barriers to Meet Application Requirements</b></p>	<p>According to a report published by the Housing Assistance Council in 2015 from collected data based on the Census Bureau’s 2009-1013 American Community Survey, there are 1,583,272 Veterans that live in Texas. With high reliability, there are approximately 32,099 in Montgomery County.</p> <p>Out of the 32k+ Veterans in Montgomery County, with high reliability: —</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 4,836 Veterans who have a service connected disability.</li> <li>- 1,581 Veterans living below the poverty level estimate</li> <li>- 2,464 Veterans who are unemployed</li> <li>- 1,779 Veterans who have less than a high school graduate certificate</li> </ul>
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# Veteran's Issues—

**Identified Problem    Data Collection**

<p>Lack of Housing Opportunities for Veterans who Have Barriers to Meet Application Requirements (continued)</p>	<p>Veterans often don't reside in areas where they are originally from, thus creating a lack of knowledge of real-estate trends. Veterans are often provided housing while in service, which may lead to a lack of understanding of locating housing options on their own. Montgomery County does not currently accept HUD-VASH Vouchers. Most leasing properties will not rent to persons with a felony</p>
<p><b>Solution:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of a housing/apartment complex for Veterans who will live within the complex while also maintaining it. Also, working with the Montgomery County Housing Authority to accept HUD-VASH Vouchers.</li> </ul>	

**Identified Problem    Data Collection**

<p>Lack of Transportation for Veterans who Reside in Rural Parts of Montgomery County</p>	<p>According to a report published by the Housing Assistance Council in 2015 from collected data based on the Census Bureau's 2009-1013 American Community Survey, there are 1,583,272 Veterans that live in Texas. With high reliability, there are approximately 32,099 in Montgomery County.</p> <p>Out of the 32k+ Veterans in Montgomery County, with high reliability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 4,836 Veterans who have a service connected disability.</li> <li>- 1,581 Veterans living below the poverty level estimate</li> <li>- 2,464 Veterans who are unemployed</li> <li>- 1,779 Veterans who have less than a high school graduate certificate</li> </ul> <p>Public transportation is offered through a bus system, but the bus system does not cover all of Montgomery County. Only the Conroe Area. Taxis are available, but are very expensive. Especially when traveling from rural areas of Montgomery County. Most agencies that provide services for Montgomery County residents are located in Conroe. Most agencies require at a minimum, a face to face appointment to set-up services.</p>
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## Veteran's Issues— Listed in priority order

***Solution:***

- Transportation options available at a reduced or free rate for Veterans who need to attend medical or benefit appointments. Options could include: taxis, shuttles, or bus rides.

## Resources Available

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

### Juvenile Justice

<i>Name of Agency</i>	<i>Agency Type</i>	<i>Description</i>
Conroe ISD Police	School	Provides school policing function to Conroe ISD.
Montgomery County Juvenile Probation	Government	MCJPD serves youth between the ages of 10 and 17 who have violated the law, or who have committed a status offense.
Montgomery County Attorney's Office	Government	The Montgomery County Attorney's Office prosecutes all juvenile cases.
Montgomery County Precinct 1 Justice of the Peace	Government	Judge Wayne Mack, in addition to his other duties as Justice of the Peace, holds regularly scheduled Truancy Court.
Montgomery County Precinct 2 Justice of the Peace	Government	Judge Trey Spikes, in addition to his other duties as Justice of the Peace, offers judicial support to the ARK program.
Montgomery County Precinct 3 Justice of the Peace	Government	Judge Edie Connelly, in addition to her other duties as Justice of the Peace, holds regularly scheduled Truancy Court.
Montgomery County Precinct 4 Justice of the Peace	Government	Judge James Metts, in addition to his other duties as Justice of the Peace, will begin holding regularly scheduled Truancy Court in 2009.
Montgomery County Precinct 5 Justice of the Peace	Government	Judge Matt Madsen, in addition to his other duties as justice of the Peace, holds regularly scheduled Truancy Court.
Splendora ISD Police	School	Provides School policing function to Splendora ISD.
Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County	Private Non Profit	Provides mediation of truancy and/or juvenile offender complaints

# Resources

## Law Enforcement:

<i>Name of Agency</i>	<i>Agency Type</i>	<i>Description</i>
Community Supervision and Corrections	Government	Community Supervision and Corrections provides adult probation services and a substance abuse/treatment facility for adults.
Conroe Police Department	Government	Conroe Police Department provides municipal police services within Conroe.
Cut and Shoot Police Department	Government	Cut and Shoot Police Department provides municipal police services within Cut and Shoot.
Magnolia Police Department	Government	Magnolia Police Department provides municipal police services within Magnolia.
Montgomery County Constable, Precinct 1	Government	Montgomery County Constable, Precinct 1, in addition to his other duties as Constable, provides the Mental Health Unit for transportation services for mental health warrants and school policing for Montgomery ISD and Willis ISD.
Montgomery County Constable, Precinct 5	Government	Montgomery County Constable, Precinct 5, in addition to his other duties as Constable, provides school policing services for Magnolia ISD.
Montgomery County - County Attorney's Office	Government	The Montgomery County Attorney's Office represents the county in civil litigation, prosecutes all juvenile cases, and provides victim coordination services.
Montgomery County District Attorney	Government	The Montgomery County District Attorney's Office provides prosecutorial services to the courts and victim coordination services.
Montgomery County Sheriff's Office	Government	The Sheriff's Department provides technical support, patrol coverage, investigative support, communications support, and critical incident coverage for 32 local agencies.
Montgomery Police Department	Government	Montgomery Police Department provides municipal police services within Montgomery.
Oak Ridge North Police Department	Government	Oak Ridge North Police Department provides municipal police services within Oak Ridge North.
Panorama Village Police Department	Government	Panorama Village Police Department provides municipal police services within Panorama Village.

# Resources

## Law Enforcement (continued):

<i>Name of Agency</i>	<i>Agency Type</i>	<i>Description</i>
Patton Village Police Department	Government	Patton Village Police Department provides municipal police services within Patton Village.
Roman Forest Police Department	Government	Roman Forest Police Department provides municipal police services within Roman Forest.
Shenandoah Police Department	Government	Shenandoah Police Department provides municipal police services within Shenandoah.
Splendora Police Department	Government	Splendora Police Department provides municipal police services within Splendora.
Stagecoach Police Department	Government	Stagecoach Police Department provides municipal police services within Stagecoach.
Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS)	Government	Law enforcement service that upholds the federal, state, and local laws and provisions throughout the State of Texas.
Willis Police Department	Government	Willis Police Department provides municipal police services within Willis.
Woodbranch Village Police Department	Government	Woodbranch Village Police Department provides municipal police services within Woodbranch Village.

## Victim Services:

Access Builds Children	Private Non-Profit	Provides supervised visitation to families to encourage and nurture the relationship between a noncustodial parent and their child(ren).
CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County	Private Non-Profit	CASA recruits, trains and supports community volunteers to be a child's voice in court for their best interests.
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Houston-Galveston	Faith Based	Provides food, clothing, financial assistance and immigration services

# Resources

## Victim Services (continued):

<i>Name of Agency</i>	<i>Agency Type</i>	<i>Description</i>
Children’s Safe Harbor (CSH)	Private Non- Profit	CSH coordinates a multidisciplinary team approach for the investigation, treatment and prosecution of child sexual and physical abuse.
Crisis Assistance Center	Private Non-Profit	Provides financial assistance to Montgomery County residents who are experiencing an unexpected crisis or need.
Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County, Inc.	Private Non-Profit	Provides free mediation of Child Protective Services (CPS) abuse/neglect cases and high quality, affordable mediation and conflict resolution services for residents of Montgomery County and surrounding areas. Also, provides an anti-bullying program for students K-8 at the beginning of each school year.
Lone Star Family Health Center	Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC)	Provides comprehensive primary healthcare services to eligible low-income residents in Montgomery County.
Lone Star Legal Aid	Private Non-Profit	The fourth largest service provider of free legal aid in the United States, LSLA provides free services on a full array of civil legal matters.
Meals on Wheels Montgomery County	Private Non-Profit	Provides home delivered meals and transportation services to the homebound elderly of Montgomery County.
Montgomery County Youth Services (MCYS)	Private Non Profit	MCYS provides prevention, intervention and diversion services to at risk youth and their families.
Montgomery County Women’s Center (MCWC)	Private Non Profit	MCWC provides advocacy, counseling and legal services in residential and nonresident settings to victims (survivors) of family, sexual and other violent crimes.

# Resources

## Victim Services (continued):

<i>Name of Agency</i>	<i>Agency Type</i>	<i>Description</i>
Montgomery County Women's Center (MCWC) continued	Private Non-Profit	Also provides community outreach programming on dating violence, bullying, sexual harassment, and family violence
Peace and Justice Network of Montgomery County, Inc.	Private Non-Profit	Fill the Gap is a peace and justice network program administered by the Interfaith of the Woodlands to assist homeless and near homeless individuals with rent and utility deposits.
Montgomery County – County Attorney Victim Assistance	Government	County Attorney – Victim Assistance provides services and information to victims.
Montgomery County District Attorney – Victim Assistance	Government	DA – Victim Assistance provides services and information to victims.
Montgomery County Law Library	Government	Provides legal information to self-represented litigants, attorneys and county personnel.
Montgomery County Sheriff – Crime Victim Officer	Government	Crime Victim Officer provides services and information to victims.
Texas Crime Victim Legal Assistance Network (TCVLAN)	Multi-Agency Collaboration	TCVLAN is a collaboration of service providers working together to ensure victims (survivors) of crime obtain the services they need to recover from their victimization through one central location.
Texas Familias Council	Advocacy Consortium	Texas Familias Council focuses on advocacy, policy and development of young Hispanic/Latino population in Montgomery County.



# Resources

## Health / Medical / Substance Abuse:

<i>Name of Agency</i>	<i>Agency Type</i>	<i>Description</i>
Children’s Safe Harbor (CSH)	Private Non-Profit	CSH, in addition to providing forensic interviews and counseling services for child sexual assault victims also conducts sexual assault examinations for children at their location.
Conroe Regional Medical Center	Hospital	Conroe Regional Medical Center provides a full continuum of general/specialty services and high-quality, patient-centered care to patients.
Memorial Herman Hospital	Hospital	Memorial Herman Hospital provides a full continuum of general/specialty services and high-quality, patient-centered care to patients.
Phoenix House	Private Non-Profit	Founded in 1967, Phoenix House is devoted to the treatment and prevention of substance abuse.
St. Luke’s Hospital	Hospital	St. Luke’s Hospital provides a full continuum of general/specialty services and high-quality, patient-centered care to patients.
The Treehouse	Private Non-Profit	The Treehouse provides individualized, structured residential care for girls ages 10 – 17 in need of a life free from abuse, delinquency, substance abuse, and neglect.
Tri-County Behavioral Healthcare	Community Mental Health	This community-based mental health agency provides mental health outpatient services to Montgomery County residents.
Lone Star Family Health Center (LSFHC)	Private Non-Profit	LSFHC provides comprehensive health services in our community. Services include medical, dental and mental health for children and adults. Sliding fee scale discounts available for uninsured with eligibility.

# Resources

## Prevention / Intervention:

<i>Name of Agency</i>	<i>Agency Type</i>	<i>Description</i>
Montgomery County Youth Services (MCYS)	Private Non-Profit	MCYS provides prevention, intervention and diversion services to at-risk youth and their families.
Montgomery County Women's Center (MCWC)	Private Non-Profit	MCWC serves victim of domestic violence and sexual assault and abuse in Montgomery and surrounding counties.
CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County	Private Non-Profit	CASA recruits, trains, and supports community volunteers to be a child's voice in court for their best interest.
Children's Safe Harbor (CSH)	Private Non-Profit	CSH coordinates a multidisciplinary team approach for the investigation, treatment and prosecution of child sexual and physical abuse.
The Friendship Center	Private Non-Profit	The Friendship Center provides a variety of programs and services that help meet the physical, social, and emotional needs senior citizens in Montgomery County.
Lone Star Community College District	Education	Lone Star Community College District provides college education at various locations throughout North Harris County and Montgomery County.
Connecting Families	Private Non-Profit	Family Outreach offers a variety of services to "at-risk" families including crisis counseling, in-home services, and referrals to other organizations.
Texas Department of Family and Protective Services - Children's Protective Services (CPS) Division	Government	CPS investigates abuse/neglect of children as well as provides services to children in their homes and in foster care.
Dispute Resolution of Montgomery County	Private Non-Profit	Provides training in alternative dispute resolution methods and sponsors the annual Conflict Resolution Day program.
Sam Houston State University	School	Sam Houston State University provides grant funded services to juveniles in the Montgomery County Juvenile Probation Department.

# Resources

## **Interagency Cooperation**

Montgomery County agencies have a long history of cooperative effort. These efforts continue today. There is a jail diversion working group which monitors the process of mental health diversions from the jail. Many of the agencies involved in victim services regularly meet to develop multi-agency case plans. Examples of this victim oriented cooperation is the Community Resource Coordinating Group (CRCG) which meets monthly to discuss placement resources for children and the Multi-Disciplinary Team which reviews juvenile investigations, medical and mental health treatment, and prosecution outcomes for juveniles. Some of the agencies currently join together to develop and submit proposals to address many of the gaps in services as the SAMHSA grant with Sam Houston State University or the Social Service Block Grant for Disaster Services. Montgomery County, Texas provides space at its community centers and other locations throughout the county so that nonprofit groups can provide services at satellite locations without the cost of rent. These endeavors will continue in the coming year and will address the identified gaps in services noted in this Community Plan. Agencies involved with the current plan will also document any new issues or solutions that need to be presented in coming planning years as well as identify new community partners that emerge over the coming year. Agencies within Montgomery County seek to provide a transparent web of services that meet the needs of those individuals and families who are in crisis due to criminal justice related issues. Further, Montgomery County agencies seek to develop prevention and intervention services to deter situations from becoming involved in the criminal justice systems.

# Resources

## **Long-Range Plan Development, Monitoring and Evaluation**

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The Montgomery 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 Montgomery 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 throughout the year 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 Montgomery County families struggling with problems described in the plan's focus areas. Efforts are being made by many Montgomery 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.

### **Contact Information**

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This Plan is available on-line at:

<http://www.h-gac.com/safety/justice-planning/planning/default.aspx>

[http://www.mctx.org/for\\_government/community\\_plan/index.php](http://www.mctx.org/for_government/community_plan/index.php)