

ROCKWALL COUNTY

CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMUNITY PLAN

FY2005

Chairperson:

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INTRODUCTION

The FY2005 Criminal Justice Plan for Rockwall County has been prepared in response to the Governor's Office Criminal Justice Division's (CJD) requirement for communities coming together to identify needs, as well as problems in their communities, and develop a plan to address those needs. This convergence of community organizations and departments is to share information, identify resources, and attempt to solve major problems that face them as a whole. The goal is to ensure that local problems are addressed through a coordinated effort of resources and that the available resources are directed at priority problems. This plan has been developed by a broad spectrum of government service providers, non-profit service providers, and citizens within the Rockwall County community.

The core group of members met over the course of two months and discussed the ideal situation, the problems, barriers, goals and objectives, available resources, and strategies to meet the community needs and fill in the gaps and services. We anticipate that the planning process and the expertise and input of the members of the planning groups will lead to the development of programs and resources that will improve the system, provide optimal services, and improve the quality of life for the individuals receiving benefits from these resources.

The Community Planning Group was chaired by Homer Flores, Chief Juvenile Probation Officer in Rockwall County, and co-chaired by Cathy Mason Penn, District Attorneys Office, and Sergeant Robert Mitchell, Rockwall County Sheriff's Department. Information compiled represents a broad area of governmental agencies with notable input from non-profit service providers.

Planning Process

This year the Rockwall County planning group issued a mass advertisement of the initial Community Plan meeting in order to attract a variety of community representatives. Three focus groups were formed at the first meeting: Victim Services, Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement, and Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

The chair and co-chairs each directed a focus group. Members from various organizations were asked to participate in one or several committees and the first meetings for the focus groups were held immediately following the first general meeting. Each focus group had control of the schedule of meetings. Each focus group identified needs, developed a list of problem statements, compiled data to

verify the problems, identified resources available in the community, and recommended the types of programs and services that should be provided in the community. The number of times a focus group met varied with some communication occurring via e-mail.

Composition of the Planning Group

The planning group is composed of a diverse representation from education, health, mental health, drug and alcohol abuse, juvenile justice, law enforcement, criminal justice, child welfare, victim services, family services, courts, public agencies, non-profit organizations, government, private sector, and citizens. Please see Appendix A.

Acknowledgement

The chair and co-chairs are gratefully appreciative of all the hard work and attention which was put into this plan by the participants of each focus group. This plan could not have been possible had it not been for their input. Special acknowledgement is given to the co-chairs for their help in organizing the focus groups and to all the members who submitted data.

Defining the Community

Rockwall County is 144 square miles, located directly east of Dallas off of Interstate 30. Rockwall County encompasses the cities of Rockwall, Royse City, Heath, Fate, and a portion of Rowlett. According to the 2000 Census, Rockwall County has grown 68% over the last ten years. According to the most recent census figures released in 2003, Rockwall County was listed as the fastest growing county in the nation in percentage of population growth. As the County continues to increase in population, the need for additional services and resources will also increase.

Rockwall County is also experiencing growth in ethnic diversity and growth in the number of students enrolled in schools. A characteristic which accompanies rapid growth is the need for additional human services. Rockwall County is at the center of urban expansion without the entire infrastructure necessary to support its population growth. Coupled with the influx of social problems that accompany any growth, this presents a unique challenge for the criminal justice system, schools, and related service providers.

VICTIM SERVICES

Child Abuse and Neglect

Child Abuse and Neglect cases continue to increase throughout Rockwall County; however, Child Protective Services (CPS) staff which supervise the cases and law enforcement who investigates these cases have not increased proportionately. The number of investigations assigned for the years 2001, 2002, and 2003 is 210, 251, and 295 respectively. This is compounded by a decrease of state monies afforded to CPS. Rockwall County is experiencing an overall increase in population and an increase in cases referred for child abuse and neglect. According to the 2000 Census, Rockwall County over the last ten years has increased sixty-eight percent (68%). Rockwall County needs additional resources to investigate child abuse and neglect cases and personnel to effectively provide adequate supervision once the case is assigned to CPS. The addition of the aforementioned resources would entertain problems identified such as a lack of transportation for counseling, evaluations, and family visits; non-English speaking victims and parents; counseling for non-offending parents and victims where abuse occurred; qualified and trained investigators; and officers to monitor and enforce protective orders. Additional resources and qualified personnel will increase the effectiveness of the investigation and supervision of child abuse and neglect cases which will result in the protection of the victims and ensure accountability to the perpetrator.

Substance Abuse

According to Census statistics, Rockwall County has one of the highest rates per capita in substance abuse deaths. The impact of substance abuse in Rockwall County reaches far beyond the obvious effects on the user. Friends and family of the user as well as the community all become victims of substance abuse. Rockwall County needs more local resources to prevent, deter, and manage individuals with substance abuse issues.

Family Violence

In addition to the increase in population, Rockwall County has also experienced an increase in Family Violence. According to the Rockwall Police Department, Family Violence has increased at a rate of 48% from 2000 to 2003. Relevant to the increase in Family Violence is the increase in magistrate orders, non-English speaking victims, undocumented victims, and an increase in applications for protective orders. There is a need for additional resources to address the victims of violence. Qualified personnel are needed to offer counseling to victims, investigate and prosecute perpetrators of family violence, and communicate effectively with non-English speaking victims. This will help to increase the

effectiveness of the treatment of victims and help to ensure that the batterer is held accountable.

Economic Factors

According to the local providers of emergency financial assistance, in the year 2002 Rockwall County has experienced a 48% increase of financial assistance provided with three hundred (300) people denied assistance. The loss of employment can cause stress which can lead to problems such as family violence, child abuse and neglect, and substance abuse. There is an increased need for indigent health care as it is becoming more difficult to qualify for state subsidized insurance.

Mental Health Treatment

The increase in population has also contributed to the increase in victims who are in need of mental treatment. The most in need cannot afford the cost of care. Additionally, there is limited space in surrounding facilities, no local halfway house, and extremely limited local after care programs. There is a need for resources and qualified personnel to perform assessments, place in treatment if needed, and provide ongoing counseling and aftercare.

Child Abuse Investigations

Reports of child abuse and neglect have continued to increase in Rockwall County; however, the number of Child Protective Services staff investigating these cases has not increased proportionately. Higher caseloads result in increased staff burnout, possibly placing children at risk. Rockwall Child Protective Services needs additional resources and qualified staff to adequately investigate allegations of abuse and neglect as well as provide continued services for both the families and children in the foster care system. Resources would include Spanish-speaking personnel, digital cameras to document injury and staff designated to provide transportation for clients. Adequate resources and qualified staff will increase the quality and effectiveness of CPS intervention for the families of Rockwall County. Specifically, reduce personnel frustration and job stress that leads to staff burnout, provide better services to Spanish-speaking clients, enable accurate documentation of physical injuries through digital photography and the reduction of staff time lost on the road due to transporting clients to service appointments.

Foster Care

The number of confirmed victims of child abuse and neglect continues to rise in Rockwall County, thereby increasing the number of children

entering the already overburdened state foster care system. This creates a problem as the growing numbers of children entering the foster care system, paired with continual state budget reductions result in reduced services and quality of care. To maintain current service levels, Rockwall County Child Protective Services will require additional funding at the county level, as well as accessing present resources such as CASA. To help mitigate this problem, additional CASA volunteers are needed to fill the service gap for children in protective custody. Additionally, funds are needed for county paid foster care to accommodate the growing number of children entering the system. By providing additional CASA volunteers to advocate for the children in foster care and county sponsored foster care, Child Protective Services will be able to meet the needs of the additional children entering the foster care system.

Child Advocates

Abused and neglected children in the custody of Child Protective Services wait too long for decisions about their future, experience instability while in foster care and are at risk for a variety of unhealthy outcomes after leaving the custody of Child Protective Services. Child Advocates (CASA volunteers) appointed by the courts will represent the best interests of abused and neglected children in protective custody and will work with Child Protective Services, the foster care system and the courts to ensure that decisions are made promptly and with sufficient information and knowledge as to what action is in the child's best interest. Additionally making sure that the children receive individual attention and services that are essential to meet their current and future needs. Child Advocates will be recruited, carefully screened and specially trained so as to fulfill their duty effectively. Child Advocates will be assigned to children based on careful review, evaluation and prioritization of the child's needs. Children will spend less time in the conservatorship of Child Protective Services and experience healthier and more optimistic outcomes after leaving the custody of Child Protective Services. Abused and neglected children must sometimes be taken into the temporary custody of Child Protective Services for their own safety. Although, this system is designed to protect them it does not always make decisions promptly or with adequate information. Children remain too long in foster care, experience great instability and are at profound risk for additional harmful outcomes such as added victimization, criminal behavior and homelessness. Child Advocates assigned by the courts will represent the best interests of abused and neglected children in the foster care system, ensuring that the children receive the services that they need while in the care of Child Protective Services. Advocates will be specially trained and supervised

by professional staff. Child Advocates will work with the children, their families, the courts and Child Protective Services to assure that decisions are made on the child's behalf with sensitivity, promptness and with as much information and insight as possible. Multi-disciplinary team meetings also facilitate the sharing of information between interested parties, thereby allowing all parties to have access to the same information and to be working together towards what is in the child's best interest. The outcome of this will be: children will experience greater stability while in conservatorship, children will spend less time in the temporary custody of the Child Protective Services and children will be safer after leaving foster care. The negative effects of child abuse and neglect and foster care such as criminal behavior, adult homelessness (aging out of the system with no family support) will be lessened because children will spend less time in custody and have improved outcomes.

Sexual Abuse Treatment

There is an identified need for increased therapy services for both the victims of child sexual abuse and their families. This is a problem, as Rockwall County presently does not have an adequate number of service providers to meet the needs of the increased number of substantiated sexual abuse victims. Also, many families that are impacted by child sexual abuse cannot afford treatment and find it difficult to pay even a sliding scale fee. To alleviate this problem, Rockwall County needs additional treatment providers specializing in sexual abuse treatment and a provision for indigent families to receive adequate care as well. Receiving treatment for the trauma of sexual abuse is essential to ensuring the pattern of abuse does not continue and these children have the opportunity to reach their full potential as healthy and productive adults.

Emergency Shelter Facility

A major problem that exists in Rockwall County is the lack of any emergency shelter facilities for juveniles. Rockwall County must transfer juveniles in need of an emergency shelter facility to neighboring counties. To alleviate this problem Rockwall County would need additional resources to build an emergency shelter facility. Almost as important as the facility is the need for qualified staff. By the existence of an emergency shelter facility located in Rockwall County we would eliminate the need to disenfranchise children from familiar surroundings, current schools and possible extended families.

Foster Homes

The number of licensed foster homes has not increased proportionately as the number of children in foster care has risen. At this time, there are only twelve licensed foster homes in the county with approximately 35 children in care. As Child Protective Services works with a family to mitigate the risk that lead to the child's removal from their home, it is essential that there is frequent family contact and visitation. This is difficult if not impossible if the child must be placed far away due to a lack of foster homes. The recruitment of additional local foster homes would allow for children to remain in close proximity to their families while participating in services that would ideally allow for their safe return to their home. Additional local foster homes would result in less time spent traveling for both the caseworker and child, increase the opportunity for family visitation and possibly allow the child to remain in their own school. Keeping Rockwall County foster children in close proximity is essential to achieving positive case outcomes for the children and their families.

Parenting Classes and Parent Mentors

There is a lack of child abuse prevention, parenting and parent mentor programs in Rockwall County. Research has shown that preventing child abuse with high-risk families is possible. It requires intensive and comprehensive interventions. Research has also shown that in-home visitation and parent mentoring increase the high-risk parents' ability to care for his/her children, therefore decreasing risk factors for child abuse. Part of this need can be alleviated through additional funding for such programs. Complimentary programs that deal with parenting, prevention education and child-care provider education reinforce and encourage prevention. Despite the proven effectiveness of prevention education, the lack of funding exists for the adequate provision of these programs. With an increase in the number of quality parenting classes, parents who have children in the custody of Child Protective Services can work their service plan without having to travel to neighboring counties. With an increase in the number of local parenting classes and parent mentoring programs Rockwall County can lower the incidence of child abuse and neglect.

Parent and Child Visitation

A problem that exists in Rockwall County is one that involves the critical need for a child-friendly facility for parental visits. Currently, children must visit with their parents in the very facility that they may have been brought to upon their removal from their home. Additionally there is a need for children who are participants in a disputed custody case to have a child-

friendly visitation area. Additional funding and space need to be secured to facilitate positive visits between children and their parents. Furthermore, the space needs to fit the specific needs for supervised visits. Additional funding, space and qualified personnel will satisfy need for a child-centered facility for parental visits.

Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Programs

Currently, Rockwall County does not offer anti-victimization education to all students or teachers. At this time anti-victimization education is not being offered to all students and teachers because of inadequate funding for the necessary materials and a shortage of trained individuals to present this information. Studies demonstrate that the general public lacks the knowledge of the availability of victim advocacy services in their area. Additional funding sources and staff would provide more teachers and students with the necessary information needed to reduce student victimization and to educate them as to the resources available to them in the community. Outreach services will educate the public about anti-victimization programs and advocacy services in their area.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

Increased Growth in Population

According to the Census Bureau, Rockwall County grew 7.9% from July 2001 to July 2002 making it the fastest growing county in the United States. The increase in population has a direct correlation to the increase in traffic offenses and accidents as well as an increase in crime. The number of law enforcement personnel has not been able to keep up with the rate of the population increase. Rockwall County law enforcement agencies need additional resources and qualified personnel to effectively provide traffic control and investigate crimes. Hiring of new officers will increase officer presence and provide prompt responses to calls for service.

Frequent low cost training is also needed to keep up with the demands on the officers. Courses would address officer safety, meet legislative requirements, and provide an increased knowledge base for law enforcement. The training would provide for personnel to handle the changing challenges of law enforcement.

Rapid Increase in Non-English Speaking Population

Coupled with the increase in population is the rapid growth in non-English speaking clientele. According to the Census, from 1990 to 2000, the non-English speaking population has increased approximately 218%. County agencies have difficulties providing effective services for this portion of the population, as communication is difficult. The law enforcement personnel able to communicate with this population have not been able to keep up with the rate of growth. The hiring of bilingual officers and training of existing personnel to become fluent in a second language would be beneficial to the county. Officers with bilingual capability would be able to provide accurate communication, gaining needed information quickly to assist in law enforcement needs.

Technology

According to the UCR crime report for 2000 and 2001, the following crimes have increased county wide: Murder – 0%; Rape – 75%; Robbery – 100%; Aggravated Assault – 66%; Burglary – 74%; Larceny – 82%; and Auto Theft – 66%. The availability of advanced technology for law enforcement helps in the response and investigations of these crimes. Currently there is no centralized communications ability for various agencies inside the county. The lack of a centralized communications system affects the interoperability of Rockwall County both in emergency and non-emergency operations. A system such as this would allow different agencies to be able to work together, thereby increasing officer efficiency and reducing redundant investigations, as criminals

tend to commit crimes inside the county in multiple jurisdictions. Advanced technology is also needed to increase officer safety and productivity, and needed to combat the increasing trend in computer crimes. Technological equipment would assist officers in detection of crime, immediate identification of offenders, crime prevention, and prosecution of offenders.

Specialized Investigative Law Enforcement Personnel

In order to handle the number of crimes committed in the county, specialized task forces or investigators would be very beneficial, handling certain types of offenses. Patrol officers would be able to respond to other calls for service promptly, increasing productivity. Specialized task forces or investigators would also increase the knowledge base of law enforcement countywide, aiding in timely apprehension and prosecution of offenders.

JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION

Substance Abuse

According to the Rockwall County Juvenile Services department, the percentage of substance abuse referrals for the years 2001 and 2002 is 21.3% and 17.9% respectively. Drugs are also a contributor to other crimes referred to the department, from property crime to assaults. It is an underlying issue that is difficult to get an exact measure of use in a community. Qualified substance abuse personnel and treatment programs are needed locally. Most of the resources are currently in Dallas or surrounding areas, but not in the immediate vicinity. The addition of personnel would include trained substance abuse counselors that would counsel with our English and non-English speaking youth. A local treatment program would benefit the community when placement would be a necessity. Additional resources and qualified personnel would increase the effectiveness in substance abuse treatment and prevention of substance abuse.

After- School Programs

Associated with the rise in county population is the rise in student population and associated rise in number of schools. According to the enrollment figures of the two school districts in the county, Rockwall and Royse City ISD, there has been a 7.4% and 1.2% increase, respectively, in student enrollment. There are not enough after-school/non-school hour community-based programs which operate at no cost or on a sliding fee scale. After-school programs provide the opportunity for programs such as peer mediation training, counseling, tutoring, leadership development and community service opportunities. Increased programs for non-school hours will help in reducing the incidents of juvenile crime by providing an increased level of supervision. Juvenile crime can be impacted positively by having fewer kids walking the neighborhoods unsupervised and through the skills that youth can gain from programs.

Parent Education/Involvement

Parents of at-risk children and youth need help in developing the skills necessary to successfully parent their children. There is a lack of resources available in Rockwall County emphasizing parent education. The Municipal and Justice Courts can benefit from having these resources at their disposal as part of the sanctions available to families. Parent education and skills training should be made available to the schools, juvenile justice system, and child protective services. The inclusion of faith-based institutions would be a necessary ingredient in trying to reach as many parents as possible. The parent education and skills training should be based on programs that have been researched and proven successful. Case coordination would be necessary to ensure that services are not duplicated for families receiving services from another agency.

Culturally Competent Programs

The level of support of current services is not adequately addressing the culturally diverse population that has been increasing over the last several years. Because of the rise in population, the agency resources available to the county have not kept pace. According to the Census, from 1990 to 2000, the non-English speaking population in Rockwall County has increased approximately 218%. County agencies have difficulties providing effective services for this portion of the population, as communication is difficult. Rockwall County needs qualified personnel to adequately communicate with our youth and their families. Qualified personnel would include counselors, probation officers, Child Protective Services employees, and employees of the social service agencies within the county. Additional personnel and programs designed to address our diverse population will enhance the effectiveness of our schools and social service agencies.

Economically Disadvantaged

According to the local providers of emergency financial assistance, in the year 2002, Rockwall County has experienced a 48% increase of financial assistance provided with three hundred (300) people denied assistance. The loss of employment can cause stress, which can lead to problems such as family violence, child and abuse neglect, and substance abuse. There is an increased need for indigent health care as it is becoming more difficult to qualify for state subsidized insurance. According to the Census, the percentage of population living below poverty in Rockwall County is at 4.7%. Although low compared to most of the state, the county is constantly seeking the necessary resources to adequately deal with this growing population. The youth associated with this population are presented with some challenges of their own. After school tutoring, after school programs and better communication with parents are some needs associated with this population. Qualified personnel and effective programs are needed to effectively assist this population. Intervening with some of the necessities of the economically disadvantaged can deter future delinquent behavior of youth and provide families with needed assistance.

Prevention

Truancy is often referred to as the origin of many deviant behaviors attributed to juveniles, including delinquent behavior, dropouts, alcohol and drug abuse, gang involvement and teen pregnancy. According to the Juvenile Services department, the truancy referrals from Rockwall ISD have increased by 6% from the 2001-2002 school year to the 2002-2003 school year. The referrals to the Juvenile Services department increased 26% from 2001 to 2002. Rockwall County needs additional resources and qualified personnel to add to or strengthen the prevention programs currently in place. This would include

academic support, case management, counseling services, residential and non-residential drug treatment, literacy programs, life and social skills, family support, and parent education. Intervening at an early stage in a child's life often results in youth being successful in school and avoiding penetration in the juvenile justice system.

Continuum of Care

There is a need to design a continuum of care that addresses early indicators of delinquent conduct such as problems in school, truancy, and cases handled by the municipal and Justice of the Peace courts. Resources at the municipal level are limited and unable to address the early stages of delinquent behavior. Qualified personnel and programs should address areas such as mentorship, early intervention for at-risk behavior, and diversion of youth into the juvenile justice system. One such program would be the addition of a model first offender program used by law enforcement, municipal courts and Justice of the Peace Courts. This type of intervention will educate and encourage youth to make better decisions while discouraging youth from participating in delinquent behavior.

APPENDIX A

ROCKWALL COUNTY COMMUNITY PLANNING PARTICIPANTS

Name	Agency
Larry Holloway	Justice of the Peace, Precinct 2
Kelly Schmidt	North Central Texas Council of Governments
Gregg Podleski	Rockwall ISD
Bob Cotti	Rockwall City Council
Gail Gray	Phoenix House
Margo Nielson	Helping Hands
Roger Nielson	Rockwall Housing Development Corporation
Alycia Deering	Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)
Brian Earles	Rockwall County Sheriff's Department
John Davila	Northeast Texas Area Task Force
Randy Parks	Rockwall County
Heather McAuley	Rockwall Police Department
Terry Raulston	Rockwall City Council
Bonnie Dockery	Terrell ISD
Marisa Trevino	NA
David Magness	Rockwall County Commissioner
John King	Rockwall City Council
Laurel Tate	Psychologist, Private Practice
Jamie Moorhead	Mental Health/Mental Retardation
David Karr	Justice of the Peace, Precinct 1
Diane Weatherford	Psychologist, Private Practice
Francisca Rodriguez	Centro de Mi Salud
Sarah Watkins	Rockwall ISD
Toni Sutton	Child Protective Services
Liz Smith	Rockwall ISD
Brett Hall	382 nd District Court
David Couch	Attorney, Private Practice
Jerry Wimpee	Rockwall County Commissioner
Rob Welsh	Royce City ISD
Norma Westurn	Centro de Mi Salud
Scott Self	Rockwall County Commissioner
Homer Flores	Rockwall County Juvenile Services

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Norma Westurn
Francisca Rodriguez
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Victims of Crime Focus Group

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