

DENTON COUNTY

CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMUNITY PLAN

FY2005

**Chairperson:
Elizabeth Parmer
Assistant District Attorney
Chief: Family Law Division
1450 McKinney Street
Denton, TX 76209**

Introduction

The 2003 Denton County Criminal Justice Plan has been prepared in response to the request of the Criminal Justice Division of the Governor's Office that communities come together to identify needs within the community and to develop plans addressing those needs. The goal is to insure that local problems are addressed through a coordinated effort of resources and that the available resources are directed at priority problems. The plan has been developed by a broad spectrum of government service providers, non-profit service providers, citizens within the community and crime victims.

This plan has been prepared under the leadership of Assistant District Attorney Elizabeth Parmer of the Denton County Criminal District Attorney's Office in conjunction with the assistance of the Denton County Criminal Justice Community Planning Executive Committee. Members of this group currently serve as members of other planning groups within the Denton County area. Denton County has been fortunate to have a creative and diverse body of government and non-profit service providers as well as interested citizens, who enthusiastically participated in the development of this plan. Each year since the 1996 initial planning process, the participation in the planning process has increased and diversified.

The planning process in Denton County has evolved over the last five years to become more than simply a means to identify community problems for grant writing purposes. The planning process has generated partnerships among participants and collaborative efforts that are being used to address community and agency issues, to develop solutions to problems and develop solutions to problems not addressed in this plan. Task forces and partnerships have been created that meet regularly to share ideas and searching for solutions.

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.

Planning Process

This year the Denton County Planning Group implemented a focus group approach to address the large number of agencies and organizations participating in the planning. This process was designed to ensure that all those involved had the opportunity to participate and have their ideas and concerns addressed. The goal of this process was to have the individuals who daily encounter certain issues supply the main input into the plan to address those issues.

The planning began April of 2003, to insure there was sufficient time for comprehensive planning. Eight focus groups were formed. These subcommittees were developed from previously defined areas of need in the 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, and 2000-2001 Community Plans for Criminal Justice. The 2003 Focus Groups are:

1. Victim Issues Focus Group
2. Child Abuse Focus Group
3. Domestic Violence Focus Group
4. Law Enforcement Focus Group
5. Juvenile Issues Focus Group

6. Mental Health Focus Group
7. Substance Abuse Focus Group
8. Training in Life Skills Focus Group

The members of the Executive Committee co-chaired these focus groups. Members from various organizations and groups as well as concerned community members were invited to participate in the various focus groups. Some members chose to participate in multiple focus groups. Each focus group met on its own schedule to identify and describe problem statements, to identify supporting data. The number of times a focus group met varied; however, most met bi-monthly over a two to three month period. The goal of each focus groups was to include individuals and groups from both the northern and southern parts of the county. They also sought inclusion of the rural areas of the county along with the metropolitan areas. Their goal was to include those that work within the area of their focus group as well as those outside that specific area so that the vast expertise of the County could be combined with new ideas and new concerns.

The Executive Committee met on October 30, 2003 to present each group's report. A copy of the plan was distributed to the members of the Executive Committee for review at this time. Discussion of presenting the plan began at this time.

Composition of the Focus Group

The focus group is composed of diverse representation from education, health, mental health, drug and alcohol abuse, juvenile justice, law enforcement, criminal justice, child welfare, victims services, children's services, family services, the courts, public agencies, non-profit organizations, government, the private sector, community association, concerned citizens, and crime victims. Complete alphabetical listing of participating individuals and an alphabetical listing of participating agencies, as well as a listing of focus groups will be included as the plan is completed. This plan is designed to address Denton County and all the cities and municipalities that lie within. (Persons who review this plan should be aware that there are cities within Denton County that are also included in Dallas County, Collin County, and Tarrant County. There are also activities and groups within this plan that interact with Cooke County.)

Organization of the Plan

This Denton County Community Plan for Criminal Justice presents the reports of the eight focus groups. The Plan is organized beginning with this overview and is followed by each subcommittee report.

The subcommittee reports are organized in the following format:

1. Problem Statements.
2. Supporting Data.

Acknowledgment

The Executive Committee and the recorders are to be recognized for their hard work, diligent attention to this task and time deadlines, and for their concern for the community.

Each has offered unique expertise and insight. The effort put forth by the Executive Committee and the entire planning group has ensured that this plan is truly representative of the problems Denton County is encountering and reflects the needs that Denton County must address. This plan would not have been possible without the input of each member of the planning group. Special acknowledgment is given to the members of the Executive Committee who provided leadership and synthesized the many ideas generated by their committees into the written subcommittee reports which make up the substance of this plan. The members of the Executive Committee and the Subcommittee they co-chaired are:

Elizabeth Parmer, Executive Committee Chair
Jackie Carpenter, Victim Issues Focus Group
Beverly Bailey, Victim Issues Focus Group
Vicki Foster, Child Abuse Focus Group
Sherri Gideon, Child Abuse Focus Group
Matt Shovlin, Domestic Violence Focus Group
Brian Jones, Domestic Violence Focus Group
Jody Gonzales, Law Enforcement Focus Group
Chris Ventura, Juvenile Issues Focus Group
Ken Metcalf, Juvenile Issues Focus Group
Judge Margaret Barnes, Mental Health Focus Group
Professor Mark Sandel, Mental Health Focus Group
Bill Schultz, Substance Abuse Focus Group
Roger Jones, Justice System Focus Group

Defining the Community

Denton County is a 900 square mile area, located directly north of Dallas and Fort Worth at the junction of IH 35E and IH 35W. It includes 33 incorporated communities and portions of Dallas, Fort Worth, Plano, Frisco, Coppell, Westlake and Southlake. It experienced unparalleled growth in the decade of the 80's, doubling in population to 300,000 people. According to the United States Census Bureau, the population of Denton County is growing at a rapid pace with a population of 432,976 as of April 1, 2000. The North Central Texas Council of Government population; estimate for January 1, 2003 is 504,650. This is a 6.28% increase in growth rate for 2002-2003. Denton County is one of the fastest growing counties in the State of Texas and is expected to increase its population by 127% by the year 2020. As the County continues to experience this hyper-population growth, the need for additional services throughout the county will also escalate.

Realistically, the county is in rapid transition. Economically, it is changing from a rural/educational base to one of retail/light industry/education. Absent at this time is substantial growth in the type of employment that would support the population explosion. Still, the leading employers in the county are public entities, such as University of North Texas, Texas Woman's University, Denton State School, the county, public schools, etc.

The population base is experiencing substantial growth in ethnic diversity. Of particular importance is the impact of non-English speaking people. For example, in 1990, the Denton Independent School District had 10,690 total students with 53 students enrolled in English as a Second Language/Bilingual Education Program. In 1998, the district had

13,000 students with 898 enrolled in the same classes. Of importance also are the number of adults in the Denton Adult Education/English as a Second Language classes. In 2001 the ESL classes were filled to capacity with 334 adults enrolled. This is a 300% increase from the previous year. People enrolled come from all over the world including the middle east, the far east, South America, Central America, Africa, the Pacific rim, and Mexico.

Another characteristic of rapid growth in populations is the accompanying acceleration in need for human services. In summary, Denton County finds itself at the center of urban expansion without the necessary economic infrastructure to support its population growth. Coupled with the influx of diverse populations and social problems which accompany any growth, this presents a unique challenge for the criminal justice system and for related service providers.

This plan is designed to address Denton County and all the cities and municipalities that lie within Denton County. (Persons who review this plan should be aware that there are cities within Denton County that are also included in Dallas County, Collin County, and Tarrant County. There are also activities and groups within this plan that interact with Cooke County.)

The Denton County Community Planning Group is comprised of representatives from the Denton Independent School District, Denton County Criminal District Attorney's Office, Denton County's Mental Health and Mental Retardation Office, Denton County's Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services-Child Protective Services Office, Denton County Community Supervision and Corrections Department, Denton County Children's Advocacy Center, Denton County Friends of the Family, Inc., Denton County Crime Reduction Committee, Denton County Bar Association, Greater Dallas Council on Alcohol & Drug Abuse, Denton County Juvenile Diversionary Services, Denton County Narcotics Task Force, Mothers Against Drunk Driving-North Texas Chapter, The City of Lewisville, Denton County Sheriff's Office, LULAC, United Way of Denton County, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Denton County, The Colony Police Department, Carrollton Police Department, Lewisville Police Department, Frisco Police Department, Denton Police Department, Denton County Health Department, Denton County Juvenile Probation, Gene Ross & Associates, Denton County citizens, and Denton County crime victims. The combination of these agencies and individuals provides a broad range of services throughout Denton County. Thus the group brings expertise and experience which is applicable to a wide array of criminal justice issues.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

INTRODUCTION

Domestic Violence is far too often viewed as an unacknowledged epidemic in the United States. In this country, it is estimated that domestic violence is just about as common as giving birth- about four million instances of each in a year. It affects families where poverty, tension, unemployment, and discrimination are common. It affects families in wealthy suburbs and middle income homes, among all people, regardless of age, race, sex, economic status, and education level. It even affects those who are not directly involved through increased taxation. However, fiscal effects are not the only pain inflicted on the citizens of the United States by domestic violence. It hurts us as a society by putting an emotional and psychological strain on anyone directly or indirectly involved in an instance of domestic violence.

Domestic Violence often does not include just a physical assault. In many cases, stalking becomes a serious issue after a violent attack. This can lead to psychological, financial, physical, and behavioral effects on the victim. In the most severe cases, domestic violence can lead to the death. About one in three murders of women in the United States were committed by a current or former spouse or boyfriend.

Domestic violence is not new, however public focus on it has increased dramatically over the past 30 years, largely due to the women's movement. Current studies and surveys tell us that physical abuse by male intimate partners is the single most common source of injury among women between the ages of 19 and 35. However, the severity of domestic violence is still largely underrated by many, and the occurrence of domestic violence is growing at extraordinary rates as the population increases. The full extent of such victimization is not known, however, it is estimated that only 1 in 7 domestic assaults come to the attention of the police. This statistic alone demonstrates a great need in proactive domestic violence prevention.

Increased number of reported domestic violence cases in Denton County. Sadly, for most areas, funding and resources continue to stay the same despite their continual population growth. The citizens of Denton County are absolutely no exception to these facts. During the previous decade, the County's population increased by 91.1 percent from 143,126 residents in 1980. The current rate of population change between 1990-00, if continued, would result in a population in 2025 of 1,365,000. That is 215.3 percent more persons than in 2000. Although it is unlikely that the county could continue to sustain the rapid population increase of the past decade for the next 25 years, the projection reveals the implication of such a continuing rate of increase if that were to happen

Even though violence between family members has many causes and roots, including personality, stress, and conflicts, there is still plenty that we as a county can and need to do. A great demand for the further development of current services and the construction of new services can be assessed by the persistent climb of population and violence in Denton County.

Language Barriers in Treatment

While treatment services for victims (adults and children) of domestic violence exist in Denton County, the demographic make-up of residents who receive services in their native language is disproportionate to the demographic breakdowns of Denton County's population. Of the estimated 466,240 people in Denton County, 15.5% speak a language other than English. Often victims cannot receive counseling or treatment services due to language barrier. Denton County is a perfect example of this, seeing that it currently does not have a single victim services counselor that speaks a language other than English. Domestic violence is a social, familial, legal, and community problem that exists in all racial, economic, and cultural groups. Victims from all demographic groups need support and treatment services in order to end the cycle of violence in our community.

Denton County needs to develop treatment programs, resources, and services that are culturally appropriate, accessible, and effective. Denton County needs to recruit and retain culturally diverse service providers and knowledgeable consultants to ensure that victims from all racial, economic, and cultural groups are served. Awareness of such services must be increased, so that appropriate referrals will be made to victims of domestic violence on all levels.

Domestic Violence Education is too Often Post-Incident

Almost all of the education and treatment available for the Domestic Violence offender is offered after the incident of Domestic Violence has occurred. Many potential Domestic Violence offenders do not know how to recognize the warning signs of Domestic Violence prior to an illegal act taking place. Many also are not aware that there are agencies available such as Batter's Intervention and Prevention Program in the area to help them with their issues prior to an illegal act being committed.

Denton County needs to get information and education regarding Domestic Violence to all potential offenders prior to the commission of an illegal act. A study should be conducted to determine a certain "at risk" population and special emphasis should be directed to that particular population. A task force staffed by personnel from multiple agencies should be formulated. This task force will go through extensive training and will put together two 30 minute presentations. One will be geared toward adults and one will be geared toward juveniles. These presentations will be presented to many different sectors of the county.

Lack of Anti-Victim Education for Students

Children are exposed to violence by family members against their mothers or female caretakers. Many parents minimize or deny the presence of children while the mothers are being assaulted. However, interviews with children of battered women reveal that they have seen, heard and can describe detailed accounts of violent behavior that their mothers or fathers never realized they had witnessed. Children who witness domestic violence experience depression and psychological distress and are more likely than other children to be physically violent. Also, a child's exposure to the father abusing the mother is the strongest risk factor for transmitting violent behavior from one generation to the next. Adolescents are also at an extreme risk of domestic violence, including dating violence. One in five adolescent girls will be physically and/or sexually abused in a dating relationship, and women ages 16 to 24 are the most vulnerable to intimate

partner violence. Also, the highest number of domestic violence incidents in Texas are committed by batterers between the ages of 20 and 24.

An age appropriate curriculum should be developed and mandated to all students in grades kindergarten-12 informing students about domestic violence and what they can do if it occurs. This education should be offered in English as well as Spanish. School interaction with outside community agencies that work with children and teens on a regular basis should also be encouraged.

Lack of Yearly Officer Training

Domestic violence incidents have nearly always been viewed as complex, dangerous, frustrating, and distasteful by police officers. There have been many reasons for this attitude, not the least of which, is ignorance of the issue of domestic violence and a reluctance to interfere in what has been viewed as a “family matter” for decades. At different times, police have been given “roles” to play when responding to domestic violence; peacemaker, marriage counselor, mediator, separator, ect. Understandably, these approaches have failed to provide any effective intervention with regard to the criminal conduct occurring at domestic violence incidents. Police have returned to the same homes time and time again and have eventually dealt with the next generation of batterers and victims.

Denton County needs to introduce effective intervention strategy training for law enforcement officers that they can use to both prevent domestic violence from recurring and/or escalating to homicide or homicide/suicide violence. This training must be repeated yearly, as laws constantly change and many officers tend to be unwilling to learn about this issue and to follow state and department mandates. This training is critical if Denton County wants to effectively intervene in the homes where violence occurs and future criminals are being raised. Proper response to domestic violence incidents will protect the agency and officers from liability, and will hopefully help decrease the reoccurrence of domestic violence in homes and the likelihood of the children of offenders becoming offenders themselves through early detection.

The following is a list of priority problems within Denton County:

Prevention Services

- Educational outreach efforts about domestic violence among the general population
- Workshops targeting different groups in the community
- Increased shelter space
- Increased counseling
- Increased safety planning and counseling for children
- Increased counseling and supervision for perpetrators
- Attorney-for-the-Day legal assistance for perpetrators
- BIPP Program at Denton County Jail

Intervention Services

- Professional, on-going training for police officers
- Professional, on-going training for judicial officials

- Professional, on-going training for school counselors and teachers
- Professional, on-going training for religious officials
- Professional, on-going training for substance abuse professionals
- Professional, on-going training for social workers who encounter cases of domestic violence in their work
- Domestic Violence Response Team
- More detectives in large police departments to specifically handle domestic violence cases, perhaps within specialized domestic violence units with the departments
- Counseling at the police department
- Assistance for illegal aliens in the country who are victims and face deportation
- Increased prosecution staff to specifically handle domestic violence cases

Support Services

- Increased economic resources to assume and maintain independent living
- Legal advocacy and accompaniment
- Job/career training
- Child care
- Transportation
- Basic interviewing/returning to work skills
- Pet care
- Judicial support
- Translators

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Difficulty in communication with the court for victims and the accused.

There is a critical need for Spanish language interpreters in all courts within Denton, County. A very large percentage of criminal defendants have Spanish as their first language. A recent survey of criminal cases pending in the five district courts revealed that 30 percent of the pending felony cases had defendants with Spanish surnames. Additionally, in a sizable number of cases where the defendant does not need an interpreter, one or more witnesses must have an interpreter.

The hiring of certified interpreters is required in many cases. Not only is this expensive, but the lack of full-time court employed interpreters results in delays in court proceedings.

Many accused criminals are not apprehended and remain in the community

A large percentage of the criminal defendants in all courts have either never been arrested, or if arrested, have failed to appear in court. This prevents a large number of victims from having their cases resolved in a reasonable length of time. Additionally, the delay in trying cases caused by the non-attendance of defendants makes the search for the truth more difficult because of witnesses' fading memories.

On November 1, 2002, fifty percent (458 out of 913) of the pending indicted felony cases handled by the court prosecutors involved defendants who had either never been arrested, or if arrested, had failed to appear in court and had not been rearrested. Sixty-nine percent (257 out of 370) of the felons with pending motions to revoke probation had either never been arrested, or if arrested, had failed to appear at their revocation hearing. Legislation recently enacted by the 78th Regular Session of the Texas Legislature will place a significant new burden on probation officers to prove at probation revocation proceedings that they tried to serve their probationers with notice of a motion to revoke their probation.

Re-arrest figures are critically low for criminal defendant's that are illegal aliens. This is true even of those aliens who continue to live in this area. A significant contributor to that problem is the inaccuracy of personal identifiers available for illegal aliens.

Although most law enforcement agencies have access to some person locating databases, very comprehensive locator databases are available but too expensive for most law enforcement agencies. Access to such databases and increased staffing of warrant divisions of law enforcement agencies would improve re-arrest rates.

Delays in forensic evidence being processed.

The lack of a crime laboratory that exclusively handles forensic evidence from Denton County necessitates reliance upon overworked crime laboratories operated by Dallas County, Tarrant County, and the Texas Department of Public Safety. This often causes a significant delay before the judicial process can begin. This in turn results in an extension of the length of pretrial incarceration for many criminal defendants.

Mentally ill criminal defendants require secure housing

Denton County lacks a public facility for emergency residential housing and treatment of mentally ill individuals. Lacking such a facility, Denton County has to transport these critically ill individuals out of county for emergency housing. Because judicial proceedings must be expeditiously conducted in Denton County, treatment is interrupted and expenses incurred in transporting these patients between the out of county facility and court.

Sex offenders with other identified mental health problems require residential treatment

No facility in Texas will take sex offenders for residential treatment of mental health or substance abuse problems. A large percent of such offenders have one or both of these problems. Lacking the availability of these residential treatment facilities, the courts and community supervision officers can only direct these offenders to out patient treatment programs. This compromises the rehabilitative potential of community supervision for the affected probationers.

Mentally ill and mentally retarded accused criminals require additional consideration in the criminal justice system

At all court levels the criminal justice system comes into contact with a large number of defendants who are mentally retarded or mentally ill. Although the vast majority of these people are legally competent to stand trial and were legally sane at the time of the offense, these individuals pose unique challenges for the courts.

Prompt recognition of these individuals is of critical importance. The earlier these people are identified, the quicker a determination of their legal competence can be made and their mental problems can be addressed. In part because the standard for legal competence is quite low, individuals make it through the system with less than an ideal comprehension of the process and the judiciary's expectation of their future behavior.

Even though defense attorneys are very conscientious about fully informing their mentally challenged clients, many of these defendants would benefit from input by specially trained court appointed special advocates. Additionally, the rehabilitation of this population would be enhanced by the use of such advocates for the entire time these defendants remain on community supervision.

A related obstacle to the successful completion of community supervision by mentally ill and mentally retarded individuals is a shortage of resources for life skills independent living training for them while they are under court supervision. Many of these people require instruction in such simple tasks as boarding and riding a bus to locations they are required to go to as a term of their community supervision.

Accused criminals frequently have substance abuse problems

A similar problem faced by the judiciary is the need to promptly identify defendants with substance abuse problems. The rehabilitation of these offenders and the protection of society could be more expeditiously addressed by our courts with early recognition of these defendants.

Denton County would benefit if resources were available to give judges and prosecutors the option of placing criminal defendants with substance abuse problems in a judicially administered intensive pretrial diversion program or an equally intensive community supervision program. Judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, community supervision officers and treatment providers would need to be involved in this effort. The shortage of community based residential treatment facilities and the retrenchment of the SAFFP program operated by Texas exacerbates this problem.

The rapidly changing Court docket and lack of updating of law enforcement

Significant financial and employee resources are unnecessarily used when police officers are either not notified that scheduled court appearances are unnecessary, or notified at the last minute. It is possible to design and write software that enhances Denton County's criminal case management software module to automatically notify law enforcement agencies of such case developments. This would both reduce the amount of overtime municipalities have to pay their officers, and increase the time on-duty personnel can devote to their law enforcement duties.

Some mentally ill individuals living in our community are at risk

The effective protective apprehension of individuals who meet our legal mental health definitions suffers because of personnel shortages and differing definitions between mental health workers and law enforcement personnel. Delays and errors have the potential for catastrophic consequences to the public as well as the mentally ill individuals

LAW ENFORCEMENT/CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Communications (Radio Interoperability)

Denton County has several major municipalities that have complete 800 MHz stand alone radio systems, or have several area cities on the same system. Some smaller municipalities have contracted with the Sheriff's Office communications for dispatch and radio service. The remainder of the smaller jurisdictions has different radio systems that are either VHF High Band or UHF. This creates a problem for radio interoperability between neighboring law enforcement jurisdiction as well as radio adaptability between jurisdictions with non similar systems.

Denton County law enforcement agencies need additional equipment, qualified personnel to effectively operate new systems and migrate existing radio system to interoperable capability between all jurisdiction within Denton County and jurisdiction outside the county for regional response capabilities.

If the problem was eliminate by increased equipment, qualified personnel to operate the equipment, and migration of existing systems. It would decrease the amount of communication barriers and response time of multi-agency or interagency emergency incidents. Radio interoperability will increase the amount interagency coordination, officer safety, and existing capabilities.

Communication (Interagency Verbal or Data Communications) Criminal Intelligence Database & Network of Users

Criminals are not limited to jurisdictional boundaries and typically perform multiple offenses. They tend to operate within a "comfort zone" and utilize the same techniques

Denton County has 45 different law enforcement agencies; many are smaller with very limited investigation / criminal analysis capabilities. Even the larger agencies are not linked to share information. There are officer safety issues involved too. Information may be developed by an agency and that agency may issue an "officer safety" bulletin through dispatch channels however; that bulletin will never reach the street officer or investigators of other area agencies not directly linked to the original broadcast.

This creates a major problem of verbal and data communications between law enforcement agencies. Many jurisdictions do not have mobile data computers (MDC) capabilities within the county. This creates a secondary problem of data sharing and data retrieval from the state, county, and local jurisdictions intra-agency records.

The increase and upgrading of equipment for high speed mobile internet and data base connection would assist in alleviating many of the current interagency communication problems. Additionally, the implementation of a countywide data system that has connection ability from mobile computers would assist in verbal / data communications by creating a web-based talk group, multi-jurisdictional crime reporting, and suspect

information sharing. A central database and agency/member access through the Internet will permit instant information transfer.

The use of this type of system and increased equipment capabilities would assist local law enforcement agencies in communications by increasing the amount of information sharing and verbal communication of single suspect multiple crime investigations for investigators. Also, the system would assist patrol officers with faster identification of immediately occurring crimes that cross jurisdictions.

Burglary (Theft in General)

Denton County is one of the fastest growing Counties in the State of Texas and in the Nation. Denton County law enforcement agencies have experiencing an increase in burglaries/thefts in general. Commercial and Residential growth Countywide has overwhelmed law enforcement agencies in the area of patrol capabilities and increased criminal investigations. This has become a serious problem for many law enforcement agencies. In addition, burglaries/thefts in residential and commercial construction sites have been one of the highest categories of burglary/theft identified by local law enforcement.

The solutions to communications and criminal intelligence database would assist in alleviating many of the problems identified with burglaries.

Developing a special unit comprised of members from Denton County law enforcement agencies to handle the over load of reports filed and to reduce amount of unsolved cases do to shortage of personnel to work these cases. This unit would enhance the communications between the law enforcement agencies in Denton County to apparent violators.

Language Barrier Problems (Several Languages)

Denton County Law Enforcement Agencies are task with the interpretation of various languages represented with the increased diversity of Denton County citizens. The patrol officers, dispatchers, investigators, school resource officers and other law enforcement agents all have a complicated job with interpreting the language of complainants, suspects, business representatives, and others within a community.

The population and diversity of Denton County citizens has increased drastically over the past five years. The amount of international business relationships that have existed for years in the DFW area have now moved into Denton County business districts and residential communities. Spanish is predominantly the language that causes barriers that law enforcement officers must overcome to properly execute their duties. However, there are many other international languages that do cause language barriers to all agencies.

An organized countywide language interpretation task force could assist in investigation of crimes with language barriers. This task force would consist of specialized employees or law enforcement officers of multiple agencies with bilingual capabilities in different languages. Secondly, training and continued education of law enforcement first responders in Spanish and language etiquette would assist in the immediate need for comprehension. Additionally, law enforcement use of private or regional organizations

that provide language interpretation, such as current dispatch language line, could be adapted to assist law enforcement with language barriers in immediate patrol contacts. Also, sign language education and knowledge has also been identified as a need throughout the county.

These language barrier solutions would assist in alleviating many of the barriers that language creates in criminal investigation contacts and would provide a higher level of patrol officer safety with ability to understand some important terminology.

Grant Identification System or Streamline Grant Process

Denton County law enforcement agencies currently research and implement many existing state and federal grant opportunities. There are hundreds of grant opportunities that Denton County jurisdictions are unaware of, have short timelines, or are not budgeted. Many grants that are identified within the middle of the existing fiscal budget year require matching funds. These local matching funds have not been budgeted and need additional funding, research, and approval from city councils or county commissioners. The short timelines that some grants require makes the application process difficult and impractical. This causes a problem for local jurisdictions to implement new grant funded programs and continue existing grant funded projects.

Denton County law enforcement agencies have the need for early identification of grant funded opportunities and a central repository for those grants. The education of grant funding organizations can assist in early notification of grant opportunities. Therefore, grant applicants will have the availability of budgeting for matching funds during the agencies budget process, and the addition of a repository to assist law enforcement agencies in sharing in the identification process.

Homeland Security / Domestic Preparedness

Denton County law enforcement agencies are in need of various specialized personal protective and emergency response equipment, response training, intelligence gathering equipment and dedicated personnel to assist in preparing for, mitigating against, respond to, and recovering from domestic and foreign acts of terrorism, potential threats of terrorism., and target hazard identification.

Denton County has experienced a growth in business and industrial growth. This increase has brought businesses and industries that are considered a target hazard to natural and man made disasters. Many of these companies store and manufacture hazardous materials, store and manufacture military, government, sensitive materials. In addition, many of the county target hazards exist because they simply provide a service or a resource to many of the community in and outside of our county. These identified concerns are what makes Denton County a potential target hazard and vulnerable area.

The various law enforcement agencies in Denton County can assist each other by creating multi-jurisdictional response teams to combat terrorism. These response teams would have the opportunity to share intelligence information, emergency response equipment, and coordination of mitigation efforts. The mitigation efforts, by law enforcement agencies, may include coordination with businesses, industries, and target hazards within the community. The education and training of these organizations can

assist in hardening these hazards by increased security measures and individual employee attention. Additionally, each individual agency would need the capability of immediate access to personal protective equipment in the event of a biological or hazardous incident.

The problem of domestic preparedness is not easily solved or completely prevented. The use of mitigation efforts, information sharing, target hardening and intelligence gathering can assist in preventing a terroristic event.

Child Safety Seat Inspections Programs / Checkpoints / Education

Denton County law enforcement agencies are in need of child passenger safety training and educational programs. Despite advances in highway and vehicle design, and an increased restraint use, the number of children who die/injured each year in crashes is unacceptable and in many cases preventable. Over ¾ old and under killed in collisions were unrestrained. National studies reflect approximately 80% of child safety restraint systems used were used incorrectly. Many local child safety seat checkpoints report a misuse of over 90%.

Although most parent/care givers attempt to do the right thing, correct installation can sometimes be difficult. Vehicles and seat belts are designed primarily for adult passengers. As a result, compatibility problems often occur between child restraint systems and safety belts. Child restraint systems are 71% effective in reducing deaths for infants in passenger cars and 54 % effective in reducing toddler deaths. Motor vehicle collisions are the leading cause of death in the U.S. for age

The various agencies in Denton County can have a large impact on the misuse and lower death rate by implementing educational programs and providing checkpoints for correct installation of child safety restraint systems. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration issues child safety restraints to those who either can not afford an appropriate seats for their child or are transporting a child in an unsafe manner. Some of the programs include injury prevention for child passengers, technical training in child seat use and installation, as well as provide education information to the public. Many other programs can be found on the NHTSA website www.nhtsa.dot.gov. These programs offer valuable tools and information for law enforcement officers and the general public. However, the use of outdated or incorrect educational material (such as air bag safety warnings) can have deadly results. Due to the large amount of information on passenger safety from vehicle manufactures and child safety seat manufactures it is often difficult for local agencies to ensure they are disseminating updated and accurate information.

As a part of the Presidential Initiative for Increasing Seat belt Use Nationwide, President Clinton asked all Americans to always wear seat belts as a first line of defense against traffic injuries and fatalities and ALWAYS keep children ages 12 and under buckled in the backseat. As a result of the initiative the Secretary of Transportation prepared a plan to design a National Strategy which emphasizes personal responsibility to buckle up and to properly secure all children while riding in motor vehicles.

While no safety program is 100% effective in all circumstances many deaths and injuries can be prevented with proper use of seat belts and child restraint systems. Through public-private partnerships, strong legislation, high visibility enforcement and effective

public education Denton County can impact injuries to children. By training emergency responders in correct use and installation of child safety restraint systems, we as law enforcement officers could conduct child seat safety checkups as well as education events.

Centralized Crime Lab (Extensive Capabilities)

The local law enforcement agencies in Denton County have experienced an increase in crimes of property and persons. Several larger agencies have the availability of moderate forensic laboratory capabilities. Smaller agencies lack any capability of intra-agency laboratory analysis. The smaller agencies must rely on the state forensic laboratory for identification and analysis, and they do not have the financial means for local private laboratory analysis. Additionally, the larger agencies use either state or private forensic laboratory which can be very costly when using private firms or timely when using state resources. The expensive private firm solution or timely state laboratory solution have caused several problems including: loss of evidence, lost chain of custody, evidence integrity, time sensitivity, lab tech court appearances, and additional evidentiary concerns.

There is a major need in all law enforcement agencies within Denton County for a fully capable forensic laboratory. A centralized criminalistic/ forensic laboratory within Denton County comprised of civilian criminal lab technicians and specialized crime scene evidence team. The laboratory will need the capabilities of analyzing everything from DNA to chemical identification and trace evidence. Therefore, there is a need for expensive specialized scientific equipment, personnel, facilities, and transportation.

This concept needs the input of all county agencies for success and court integrity. The addition of a centralized criminal forensic laboratory will assist law enforcement agencies with timely crime scene evidence detection, collection, preservation, identification, and assisting local agencies and prosecutors with presentation of evidence and professional court appearances.

Mental Health / MHMR Response = Emergency Mental Commitment/Detentions

Emergency mental health incidents have continued to rise throughout Denton County. These crisis incidents require the immediate response, protection and stabilization of the scene by law enforcement in order to prevent imminent danger to the person or to others. Many times the appropriate protective response requires law enforcement to make an immediate emergency mental detention without a commitment warrant. However, law enforcement agencies in Denton County have no authorized mental health facility in which to take these detainees for involuntary hospitalization.

During normal MHMR business hours, should law enforcement respond to a scene and determine that an emergency detention is appropriate, county MHMR procedures require law enforcement stand by at the scene while Dispatch contacts the local MHMR office. A MHMR Clinician will then respond to the scene for an assessment. After confirming an emergency commitment is necessary, the Clinician travels to Denton and obtains a judges order, returning with a Deputy of the Mental Health Unit of the Denton County Sheriff's Dept to transport the person to the State Mental Hospital in Wichita Falls, Texas for evaluation.

The emergency mental health detention process in Denton County can take up to 5 hours or more to complete and requires at least two officers assigned to wait at the scene while MHMR responds to the scene, makes their evaluation, travels to the court, and returns with the order and MHMR Deputies. The long process has a potential of encouraging no action or delayed action in situations that should be immediately disposed of. The current process, which may be adequate in smaller counties, has not kept pace with the rapid growth of Denton County.

Denton County law enforcement agencies need a local MHMR approved mental health facility that is located in-county and that can accept persons involuntarily detained for emergency mental health reasons. Denton County needs an emergency mental health detention process similar to our neighboring counties of Dallas and Tarrant. In those counties, officers' making emergency mental health detentions make the detention, complete the necessary paperwork, and deliver the person to the custody of the local MHMR approved facility for evaluation.

Residential / Urban Comprehensive Traffic Enforcement

Denton County's current annual growth rate is 6.28 %. This rapid growth has resulted in the addition of many new residential subdivisions. As with traffic flow on the Interstate highways, urban infrastructure is often unable to handle the larger traffic demands.

The major neighborhood complaint heard throughout the county is traffic issues such as speeding, red light, and stop sign violations. These problems affect quality of life in the communities, along with financial impact on cities through enforcement efforts and accident investigations. Rising health care and insurance costs are also affected by higher accident rates.

A comprehensive enforcement program aimed at violations in urban and residential areas would allow cities to maintain officer availability for call response and still respond to these citizen complaints. This type of program would also increase voluntary compliance by drivers.

Victim Assistance Programs

The county lacks an adequate number of victim advocates and advocacy programs. While Denton County victims have been fortunate to receive quality services, the growth in population is draining the available resources. Victim Advocates working within law enforcement agencies are able to assist first responders at the scene with crisis intervention and referrals. The rural areas and smaller cities have traditionally lacked the funds to provide services. With the advancing populations, and to be proactive, the increase in victim advocates should be at a minimum proportionate to growth in population.

Historically sexual assault is underreported; child abuse victims are growing at an exponential rate, the number of reported family violence, robbery and aggravated assault cases to law enforcement continues to rise as well. Moreover, it is essential for the community, the state, county and municipal governments to understand the issues involved in victimology.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Substance abuse is a serious problem for the residents of Denton County. According to a nationally accepted formula 10% of the population is chemically dependent. Approximately 504,650 residents populate Denton County, and following the above nationally accepted formula, approximately 50,000 people are in need of some intervention service.

Service providers and governmental agencies are overwhelmed with the tremendous workload, many substance abusers in Denton County do not receive early treatment and end up in the criminal justice system or worse, dead. Despite the population growth, intervention services and prevention programs are on the decline in Denton County and are therefore unable to meet the needs of the growing county. In Denton County, 838 misdemeanor and felony drug cases were prosecuted in 2002, 1,425 felony and misdemeanor alcohol cases were prosecuted, 2,240 persons were on probation for substance abuse offenses for 2002, and 429 cases for underage drinking citations were issued in 2002. Moreover, 10 cases were prosecuted involving the injury or death of a victim due to alcohol or drugs.

Prevention programs are under-funded and sporadic. The general school population receives very little prevention education and the general public has little knowledge about the costs it pays for impaired driving and other substance abuse crimes. Moreover, there are no formal or consistent drug prevention programs available to school-aged children or their parents. Furthermore, Denton County is home to three universities where drunk driving and drug abuse is all too familiar to college-aged students. Education awareness programs geared towards this age group is also fundamental in the prevention of drug and alcohol abuse. According to the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (TCADA), 71% of students in grades 7-12 reported using alcohol, with 26% considered binge drinkers.

Human suffering and costs are harder to measure. In 2002, in Denton County, 24 persons were killed in alcohol related crashes.

Prevention

A vital tool in early abuse prevention is a coalition team to coordinate and communicate the various needs of Denton County residents. This team would consist of various members of the community, each with a different role in the county in regards to drugs and/or alcohol abuse while also combining law enforcement members. This team is an essential step in the various organizations and departments involved in substance abuse and law enforcement to communicate and corroborate to create successful plans and programs. The focus of the coalition team is to create unity among the various organizations in order to make each plan and program stronger and more effective.

There is no consistent, early abuse prevention education program for the primary grades. Furthermore, there has been a decrease in these types of programs and without proper funding Denton County schools are unable to utilize these programs for all schools and grades.

There are no ongoing substance prevention programs for middle schools, high schools, and colleges in Denton County. There are some programs aimed at specific times of the year such as prom and graduation. These programs depend on volunteers from various agencies such as fire departments, law enforcement, nonprofit groups, and parents. While these programs are effective for the short term, there are no consistent substance abuse prevention programs for this population. Most schools offer only “crisis oriented” rather than “prevention oriented” programs.

Moreover, there are no ongoing public awareness programs to inform residents about the costs of substance abuse in Denton County. Several nonprofit and governmental agencies have speaker bureaus for schools and clubs, but they are limited in resources and personnel. Speakers in schools and clubs offer an opportunity to create more “prevention oriented” programs for school-aged children.

There is also no program aimed at informing the minority population in the county about the dangers of substance abuse.

Treatment

There is no local, affordable treatment center. Persons who can afford private facilities have some choices, but others must get on waiting lists for out of county facilities. This type of treatment costs between \$150-\$1,000 a day and treatment can last from 30-90 days. High costs put this type of treatment out of reach for many families. The competition for Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse grants for beds at participating facilities is so great most persons with financial resources do not receive the inpatient treatment they need. State funding is decreasing.

There is no local, free diagnostic center or provider of continuum care. While an abuser may know he/she needs help, if there is no place to go for comprehensive care at all levels of abuse, they will probably revert to old habits.

There is no medically supervised detox center in Denton County. Currently the hospital emergency rooms and the jail’s “drunk tank” provide this service for residents. This type of center is very expensive to run. Medical personnel are required along with all the supplies needed. This treatment can be from 24 hours to 10 days. The lack of detoxification services must be addressed. The increased availability of physically addictive chemicals (alcohol, prescription drugs, opiates, and others) augments the chance of loss of life. In order for treatment to be successful, a safe and complete detoxification must be place first. Death from no medical detox is a reality and is ever present in Denton County.

Effective and affordable substance abuse treatment in Denton County is greatly limited. The few comprehensive programs that do exist, cater to a limited population. They provide services to either the financially wealthy or the criminal element. All state funded substance abuse services have been discontinued other than a new intensive outpatient program in the southern part of Denton County. The existing private outpatient programs cost from \$40.00 to \$100.00 per hour with detox and inpatient services costing from \$600 per day and up. Those persons with private insurance may find themselves paying up to 90% of the charges for necessary services.

Persons involved in the criminal justice system have some treatment services offered to them. These services are provided by the Adult and Juvenile Probation Department, Juvenile detention and the Denton County Sheriff's office. Needless to say, if these substance abuse issues had been addressed early on by available programs, many of these persons may not have become involved in the criminal justice system.

Life skills programs are minimal and those that exist don't incorporate substance abuse. If skills such as parenting were included in treatment programs hopefully the substance abuser would not raise another substance abuser.

There is no comprehensive directory of substance abuse providers in Denton County.

Training

There is a lack of continued training for prosecutors. Many criminal cases are misdemeanor DWI's, and usually the newest prosecutors are in these courts. Consistent prosecution guidelines would help insure these cases are handled more efficiently.

There needs to be more frequent training of police officers. While most officers want to get the drunk off the road, DWI arrests are very time consuming. They can take from 3-4 hours. It is a hard decision to stop a suspected DWI if the officer is about to go off duty or if the officer knows the offender. Persons who would receive some intervention for alcohol abuse, or at the least suffer embarrassment for being arrested, continues as usual, because they are not stopped for DWI.

Training would also be invaluable for not only police officers, but also prosecutors, parents, teachers, and a mentor program led by other youths. These people play an important role in the prevention of drug and alcohol abuse in the lives of Denton County children. Furthermore, training will also give these people an insight to the seriousness of this problem. Moreover, a mentor program led by teenagers for younger children will give younger children an opportunity to have a role model that they can relate to. It will also give the mentor an incentive to be a good role model for their student and make the choice to remain drug and alcohol free. These types of mentor programs have been extremely successful.

Housing impact on substance abuse

After a person is discharged from a treatment center, if basic needs are not met, the vicious cycle will probably start all over. Too many times the only available housing is in areas of high substance abuse. There is very little affordable single family housing.

VICTIM'S ISSUES

Access to Affordable Services

Transportation

Many victims in Denton County are unable to obtain special services, to attend court, or meet with police officers, get to medical or therapy appointments, or get to shelters. There is a lack of transportation for victims in Denton County.

Victims are not getting the counseling, medical services, access to shelters and other services that they truly need. We have many victims that walk to court for the trial or the police departments to give statements. We have clients that are unable to seek medical attention or receive counseling due to a lack of transportation.

Funding to provide to a vehicle, cell phone, driver, and insurance is critical in solving this problem. Drivers would provide transportation services to the county. These services would be coordinated by being contacted by the victim and writing down date, time, and location in which services are needed. Another attempt to alleviate the transportation problem is if each county police department would increase insurance on one specific car in the fleet then that could be the transport car for their jurisdictions.

Daycare

Affordable daycare is another challenging issue that victims in Denton County face. There is very limited affordable daycare. Many families have to sacrifice cleanliness and safety for lower cost daycare. Also many families do not receive adequate support through community resources, medical, therapy or other services because they cannot afford childcare while they are tending to their needs or other children in the family.

Victims or victims' families are either struggling financially, or have become a single parent household, as a result of the crime committed against someone in their household. Many times primary caregivers have to work longer hours or several jobs to meet financial obligations and the needs of their families. Safe and affordable daycare is a necessity. There were 300 child victims of physical abuse and sexual assault served at the Denton County District Attorney's Office in 2002 of those 300 cases 45 of those families were unable to afford safe daycare.

To alleviate this problem we need to find facilities that are willing to take a lower rate for these families or establish facilities or programs which meet these needs. Funding to train and certify in-home daycare providers to provide care at flexible hours and temporary childcare and accept direct payments from Crime Victims Compensation.

Transitional Living

A growing problem in Denton County is the lack of transitional living. Some crime victims are unable to afford a safe location. Many victims leave their situation with literally nothing and with no where to go. Victims need transitional living to help them get back on their feet financially.

There are very few women's and homeless' shelters. There are no shelters for men with female children. While these shelters could provide relief for up to 30 days some families need assistance longer than 30 days. There is also a need for more low income housing/apartments to help victims and their families past the 30 days. Last year the Denton County District Attorney's Office referred 1057 victims to a shelter. This is a problem because Denton County has only one domestic violence shelter; therefore victims often have to be placed on a waiting list or referred to other shelters outside of the county.

To alleviate these problems we could seek grant funding for more shelters and low income housing. Another possibility is finding local apartment complexes that would be willing to rent out one apartment or two at a lower rate to act as a transitional living option. Funds are needed to provide short-term emergency shelter at local hotels for crime victims and their families. Also there needs to be funding for an appropriate-designed shelter for men with female children.

Legal Services

Affordable legal services for victims in Denton County are a real problem. In fact for many families' these services do not exist. Many families cannot even pay their bills and they are still told they make too much money to receive help. Legal help is available through one low cost legal service in the area; however it is difficult to qualify for these services. Legal Aid of Northwest Texas has only 3 attorneys on staff. Many families are turned away because they make too much money to qualify for assistance.

Victims' and their families are not getting the legal help and services they need. Crime Victims' Compensation will not cover civil issues. Many families cannot afford to retain an attorney so this is not an option for them. Many legal problems that arise for victims as a result of the crime pertain to numerous areas of law. Some of these include: Family Law for divorces and/or custody issues, protective orders, Personal Injury Law, debt/bankruptcy, immigration laws and estate preservations/planners. Many victims have a need for these types of attorneys at low or no costs. These services are not available. There is one low cost legal service in the area, but they turn away dozens of people who are barely getting by because "they make too much money." A majority of victims in Denton County fall through the cracks. As a result of this gap in services they go without legal assistance.

A possible way to alleviate this problem is to contact the Texas Bar Association to see if any attorneys are willing to do some pro bono work with the victims or accept very low fees. Another possible solution would be the creation of an ongoing office that has on staff two attorneys and several paralegals to assist victims with legal issues. Another possible solution would be creation/expansion.

Medical Insurance/Resources

A large number of Crime Victims do not have medical insurance. Crime Victims' Compensation will cover some medical expenses related to the crime, but most victims cannot afford to pay these large out of pocket expenses.

Denton County	Children in	Medicaid Providers		
Year	Child Population*	CPS Care*	(Family Practice/Pediatrics)**	Uninsured Under
19**				
2001	122,676	321		
2002	125,512	602	24 (As of July 2003)	14,481

*Source: The Texas Kids Count Project-Center for Public Policy Priorities, Austin, Texas

**Source: Texas Health and Human Services, Denton, Texas

Victims are not getting the medical treatment they need which leads to more serious medical problems later. Children have CHIPS, Medicaid, and Pedi Place to name a few. In the southern part of Denton County adults have Christian Community Action (CCA) and the health department. These two agencies are helpful but cannot meet the demands of this population. The Health Department will only accept people who have an extremely low income. Many victims fall through the cracks. Christian Community Action has to turn many away because the demand is too high. As for the northern part of the county the problem is much larger. There is a large gap in low cost treatment for children and adults.

This problem is so involved that it cannot be solved right away. However there are several ways in which we could help reduce the number of victims that go without help. One is to work closely with the Denton County Health Department which would be a valuable resource for some victims. These victims can go to the health department for free or low cost services. In an emergency situation, patients can go to the emergency room. A patient does not have to pay to be seen. However, this is only a temporary fix as they will eventually receive a bill. Another possible solution would be for Denton County agencies and victim advocates to work with the Healthy Communities Coalition of Denton County to address gaps for children and adults in the northern part of the county. A teamwork approach involving many agencies could help reduce the lack of medical services available for victims. Victim advocates could also contact companies to try to set up programs whereby families would receive free or reduced fees for necessary medications. Funding to support a program coordinator for the Healthy Communities coalition would be very helpful in solving this problem.

Education and Awareness

The citizens of Denton County generally do not understand issues surrounding victimology, the legal process and available resources. There is a lack of education of all aspects of the criminal justice system, including but not limited to specialized laws on immigration, family law, and child abuse. There is no awareness of "true crimes" that occur in the area.

The general public is unaware of the violent crimes that are occurring within their communities due to a lack of a continuum of education and communication via media and other sources. Budgetary cuts and reduced funding for education, public awareness and communication have virtually eliminated the ability to educate the citizens of this county on the processes of the legal system, victimology and available resources. Consequently, victims may incur further trauma if intervention is not successful and face frustration in trying to navigate their way through the system and to alleviate being re-victimized. Although Denton County as a whole maintains a relatively low crime rate and is a safe place to live and work, violent crimes do occur. With an increase in population there will be an increase in the number of victims of violent crimes. We have

approximately 28 law enforcement entities. In 2002 the Denton County Crime Victim's Coalition conducted training on victims' rights for law enforcement, 50 people were in attendance.

The public needs education regarding the legal system and its processes. Education and awareness would focus on the following areas: public & private schools, corporations, parents, hospitals, the judicial branch including prosecutors, judges and the Grand Jury, the media, care facilities, college and universities, faith-based organizations, home school organizations, continuing education for professionals, day cares, anti-victimization, young children, and the elderly. Funding to support a county-wide position of public education coordinator is critical. The responsibility of this position would be to create campaigns, training, seminars, and media relations for public education regarding anti-victimization training, victimology, the legal process, and available resources.

Victim Advocates

Crime Victims are steadily increasing every year and there are not enough victims' advocates available. In 2001, 11,849,006 criminal offenses were reported to the police in the United States, a 2.1 percent increase over the previous year. Of these, 1,436,611 were violent offenses, and the remaining 10,412,395 were property offenses. *

*Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2002). Crime in the United States 2001. Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice

Some victims go without an advocate which denies them emotional support, education about the criminal justice system in order to avoid being re-victimized by a system that should provide them with justice, and valuable resources in the community that are available to them. Another problem is that many victims of crime are not able to collect the restitution ordered by the court from their victimizers; a victim advocate would aid the victim in this area as well. In short, if there is no victim advocate available then no one is assisting or helping the victim and their family.

A way to alleviate this problem is to create more advocate positions and also create a volunteer program either standing by itself or within programs that have victim advocates. Programs that have victim advocates would need additional funding in order to support the time, training and space needed for volunteers. A stand-alone program would need a coordinator. The coordinator would make an organized effort to go out to the universities, RSVP, the community, and businesses to recruit volunteers. These volunteers could provide education about the justice system, aid families in getting their restitution and CVC, provide court accompaniment, provide information on valuable resources, give emotional support, and follow up on the victims after they have left the system. These volunteers would be filling the victim's needs where there is currently a large gap.

Multicultural Barriers/Program

Denton County is experiencing an extremely high rate of the growth in population including minorities. Through this growth, the county's population continues to diversify.

There is a lack of sensitivity and accommodation for victims and their families from other cultures. This diversification necessitates the need for services to address the needs of other cultures as well as additions to the traditional Spanish language services. Professionals are unaware of accepted norms in various cultures. In 2002 The United Way of Metropolitan Dallas, in conjunction with the City of Lewisville, completed an extensive Community Needs Assessment, which included Denton County. Results of this survey indicate that one out of six people in our region of Texas do not speak English well. A separate needs assessment, completed in 1999, by the City of Denton, the Flow Foundation and the United Way of Denton County identified demographics in Denton County as changing drastically particularly in the growing Hispanic and Asian populations. This study showed that in an eight year time period, the Hispanic population in Denton County grew 65.6 percent while the Asian population increased 107.2 percent.

Victims from other countries, cultures and religions may not know the laws of the land and may accept behaviors or actions that are deemed criminal acts in the U.S. Cultural and language barriers decrease the reporting, investigation and prosecution of crime. Also cultural and language barriers prohibit crime victims access to basic, medical, therapeutic and legal services. Agencies within the criminal justice system need access to interpreters and cultural awareness assistance. Cultural differences may create fears of deportation or retaliation. Different religions related to culture may also be a barrier in some instances. Professionals may not understand the various cultural barriers.

Create a multicultural welcoming and/or educational process within the county. This process could provide access and coordination of translation, language and culturally appropriate services. International students and/or interns from area universities and community colleges may assist as well as return missionaries from area churches. Universities and community college will be asked to collaborate with social services and community organizations. Training needs to be provided for victims' and public and private professionals in order to improve sensitivity and accommodation for multicultural victims and their families. In addition there needs to be an increase of bilingual personnel working in agencies.

Therapeutic

Many crime victims in Denton County are not receiving the therapeutic services that they desperately need.

Many non profit agencies in Denton County have long waiting lists for services or are completely full, and unable to see additional clients. As for private counseling many victims cannot afford these services, or the sliding scale fees. They need free therapeutic services that will address the specialized needs of victims. Some specialized needs include for victims include suicide crisis intervention, crisis intervention, prevention services, survivor's services, and group and individual therapy. There is a lack of specialized training for professionals in these areas including critical incident training.

The availability of more trained therapists in these areas of suicide crisis, critical incident training, prevention services, and group and individual counseling for victims and survivors would address these needs. Counseling and social work students at the University of North Texas and Texas Woman's University are required to complete

service hours as practicum or interns. The counseling and social work departments at UNT and TWU departments may be willing to work with criminal justice agencies in providing counseling services to victims. Local therapists in private practice may be willing to donate counseling hours as a community also. In addition we could establish a program coordinator position to work with both of the universities' programs and private professionals to manage the distribution of pro-bono hours.

Interagency

Interagency cooperation is an issue. There is a lack of coordination among public and private organizations dealing with crime victims. This leads to a duplication of efforts, lost productivity and re-victimization of crime victims by the system. There is also a lack of emergency services available to victims and their families. Some of these services include legal aid, affordable counseling, children's emergency shelter, therapeutic teen shelter, and emergency shelters for victims and their families. At the Denton County Crime Victim's Coalition meetings the different agencies have verified that there is a need for the agencies to work together; however, there is no way of tracking the duplicated services and the lack of services through the agencies.

Each agency is so overwhelmed and involved in their individual caseloads that they do not have time and personnel to coordinate with other agencies. Victims of violent crime and their families have not been served efficiently through exchanges of information and victim assistance plans or other victim services/ providers. Victim Services should collaborate to increase communication and inform other agencies about their respective roles and responsibilities. Multi-disciplinary training for professionals is needed for increasing education and awareness.

A program coordinator as well as technology is needed to ensure that victims have access to all available resources through a coordinated referral system. It is necessary to establish a task force to address automation needs of victim service providers and acquire computer automation equipment and training.

MENTAL HEALTH

Youth / Juvenile Offenders

Juvenile offenders frequently have mental health needs which require mental health stabilization or crisis management (hospitalization). Many of these juveniles have undiagnosed mental illnesses or have been diagnosed with a mental illness, but have not maintained their medications. Without this assistance these juveniles are at a high risk to re-offend, harm themselves, or harm others.

There are inadequate resources in Denton County to provide juvenile offenders with prompt mental health evaluations. The need for mental health services for students in Denton County continues to increase, while available services and resources are not increasing in the same proportion as the need. There is a need in Denton County to provide short term psychiatric care for juvenile offenders who may need medication stabilization or other treatment for mental illness. These juveniles may not qualify for North Texas State Hospital or have private insurance for their healthcare. These juveniles need immediate care without lengthy waiting periods for appointments. Without private insurance, this becomes a burden and places a tremendous hardship on the county juvenile probation department. For this group, there are few local resources and the lack of mental health services is acute. With over 3000 families consisting of grandparents raising grandchildren, Denton County is experiencing a growing population of juveniles at high risk of mental health problems and/or involvement with the juvenile justice system.

Denton County needs a child and adolescent mental health facility to assess, treat, and possibly house school aged residents with mental health needs. Qualified personnel could assess client needs (including crisis intervention), make appropriate action plans, offer resource referral if necessary, and follow up with aftercare casework. A child and adolescent mental health facility would streamline and strengthen services, therefore reducing the number of court referrals, the waiting list at MHMR, the number of students at county Alternative Education Programs (AEP), Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs (JJAEP), and detention centers, and the long term financial commitments of the county. This would ultimately demonstrate that Denton County is committed to ensuring that all residents have access to needed services, and that the county is committed to improving the quality of life for its resident families.

Adult Offenders

Offenders with mental health needs

Adult offenders frequently have mental health needs which require mental health stabilization or crisis management (hospitalization), but no resources exist in Denton County at present. Many of these adults have undiagnosed mental illnesses or have been diagnosed with a mental illness, but have been unable to maintain treatment.

Without in-patient assistance these adults are at a high risk to re-offend, harm themselves, or harm others.

Continued reductions in funding result in elimination of programs and a forced focus on crisis stabilization. Public MH/MR service in Denton County is the least per capita funded center in Texas, one of the state's fastest growing counties. Yet, the county has no in-patient mental health/substance abuse units, no crisis stabilization residential program, limited out-patient mental health and substance abuse programs for the indigent, waiting lists for supported housing programs for mental health and residential programs for mental retardation, limited in-home and family support programs, no mental illness prevention programs for the indigent, and possible elimination of more programs in fiscal year 2005.

Offenders who are mentally retarded

Persons with mental retardation and other pervasive disorders are entering into a justice system not designed to cope with their unique needs. Many of them have not been adequately prepared for independent living by the time they leave the public school setting.

There is a lack of resources to provide proper intake training and qualified assessment. Persons with mental retardation and other pervasive disorders may not be accorded the timely screenings as mandated by mental health codes on entrance into the justice system.

Persons with mental retardation and other pervasive disorders should not be placed in the general holding areas for long periods of time. Formal testing, especially for juveniles in the system, should occur in a timely fashion and reporting should be available in a useful time frame.

Local Treatment

Mentally ill offenders are entering the criminal justice system with significant service needs. No local facilities are available for the treatment of the mentally ill, particularly those with a criminal record. It is critical that emergency treatment for the mentally ill be provided locally. Long term treatment (up to 90 days) can be avoided in many cases because of the availability of out-patient care at the local level. The growth in applications processed requesting mental health services rose 33% from 305 in 2001 to 400 in 2002.

Recommendation

Denton County needs to immediately establish a broad-based coalition group of agencies, citizens, and consumer groups to seek funding and solutions to the following priority problems/needs:

- (1) 24/7 crisis stabilization facility for short term treatment in Denton County;
- (2) accessible, immediate psychiatric services (no-wait) in all parts of the county, including medications;
- (3) comprehensive services available for families with grandparents raising grandchildren;
- (4) expanded access to services for young people with cognitive disabilities, including supported employment, job coaching, employment readiness, case management and respite;
- (5) training for judges, law enforcement, and jail staff on recognizing and responding to mental illness and mental retardation; and
- (6) development and maintenance of a multi-faceted, collaborative work group to further identify needs and develop strategies for meeting these needs.

Juvenile Crime

At-risk Students

Denton County Schools have an insufficient number of personnel to work with at-risk children including; school resource officers, counselors, after-school program staff, and pre-school program staff. Denton County schools continue to grow at a rapid pace. Many children need specially trained personnel to assist them in being successful in school. These children are at-risk for truancy, dropping out of school, poor grades, and a lack of job skills and preparedness. Funding for personnel and program implementation is needed to assist these children, and their families.

There is a need to confront criminal behavior and other behavior problems in the school setting. Persistent misconduct continues to be a costly issue facing local school districts. Criminal behavior and other persistent behavior problems during the school setting or at school sponsored activities are disruptive and costly to the educational process. Programs and personnel are needed that address criminal behavior including programs that address violence and/or gang involvement and other persistent behavior problems.

Mental Health Needs

Residential needs for children with both mental health and criminal behavior needs. Without access to residential programs to provide highly structured and therapeutic environments, youth who have both mental health illnesses and criminal behaviors continue to be disruptive to the learning process and continue to commit crimes in the community. Funding to allow access to appropriate residential treatment needs to be available for children identified with mental health needs who have engaged in criminal behavior.

Psychological and psychiatric evaluations are needed to accurately assess the mental health needs of at-risk offenders. Some youth have unidentified/undiagnosed mental health issues that are contributory factors in their criminal behaviors. If at-risk youth have mental health issues, they need to be treated by the appropriate personnel, in addition to addressing criminal thought processes. Appropriate funding for personnel is needed to perform psychological and psychiatric evaluations.

Juveniles with mental health issues need timely professional community based screening and help. These juveniles and their families often do not seek or persist in seeking services if the services are not readily available, assessable, and convenient. When communities do not have convenient community based mental health services the at-risk behaviors of these juveniles go unaddressed. Often these children continue in delinquent behavior. Well staffed, advertised, and accessible community based services need to be provided in Denton County.

Interfacing with multicultural backgrounds

Juveniles and families from minority populations are often unfamiliar with public educational and community based programs and services available to help them and their children. Children and families who do not avail themselves of educational, community and faith based programs miss opportunities for success and improvement that are being utilized by other children and families. The result may be educational and career tracks that are limited in opportunity resulting in truancy, increased drop-out rates, lower paying jobs, etc. Proactive community based programs focused on assisting minority juveniles and their families need to be developed and offered to our minority population.

Communication and Educational Needs

The County has no current comprehensive resource listing for its many programs. A comprehensive listing of services and programs is not available to Professionals and families in need. Technology should be used to provide an internet listing for the many services offered in Denton County.

There is a need to expand and develop the network of agencies who serve at-risk youth. Professional groups that inform, educate and train the network of providers is lacking. Often professionals are unaware of the specific roles and services other agencies may or may not be providing. Agencies need to continue to inform and educate one another as to the appropriate referral processes and how to verify that services have been provided. County wide organizations need to be developed that link professionals and service providers. Information distribution of program services, information regarding how to refer youth to programs, and methods of verifying services need to be developed and coordinated.

Denton County lacks an integrated information technology system for tracking juvenile crime. Agencies and professionals spend many additional hours in redundant reporting, processing and tracking juveniles due to the lack of an integrated juvenile justice system. The County needs to develop or become part of an integrated juvenile tracking system.

Sexual Behavior

Youth who engage in criminal sexual behaviors require the appropriate assessment, subsequent level of care, treatment and ongoing monitoring and supervision necessary to address their behaviors. The costs to society are significant regarding the emotional, physical, and financial impact, of untreated youth who are a threat to the public safety. Funding for personnel, and program implementation, is needed to address the High-Risk Youth's needs, treatment, care, and ongoing supervision. Assessment, treatment, and supervision are expensive interventions requiring the personnel and programs necessary to perform such duties.

The County has a lack of prevention and awareness programs for children regarding socialization, and sexual behavior. Juveniles who make unhealthy choices are often vulnerable to life long consequences that restrict their ability to enjoy life and contribute positively to society. Many of these children become dependent on expensive medical treatment that could be avoided if given proper direction and counseling prior to

engaging in these at-risk behaviors. The County needs prevention programs to address proper sexual behavior in regard to making healthy choices in socializing, dating, aids awareness, and other behaviors that place youth at-risk of sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy and other at-risk consequences.

Illicit Drug and Alcohol Usage

At-risk youth have unidentified and untreated substance abuse and dependency issues. Drug offense referrals are approximately 10% of the total number of referrals to the Denton County Juvenile Court Services. Drug use is also a significant factor in other criminal behaviors of youth. Substance abuse by youth is an issue in schools and the community and is a factor in truancy, morbidity and mortality, violent and gang related crimes, law enforcement personnel risks and costs. Services are needed to identify the degree of substance abuse and/or dependency, and the appropriate level of care or treatment available to the youth. Programs need to be established to provide services of the appropriate level of care including individual, supportive outpatient, intensive outpatient, residential treatment and Aftercare services.

Transportation for At-Risk Youth and Families

There is a lack of available/affordable transportation for youth and families to the programs and services provided in Denton County. Many families lack the transportation necessary to attend community programs. Funding for and transportation system needs to be available, county wide, for those identified in financial need and in need of services. This could be in the form of a contracted provider, existing or new service provider stipends for transportation, or providing in-home services to those in need.

CHILD NEGLECT

Juveniles with a history of neglect are at an increased risk of being involved in the criminal justice system. These youth often have involvement with more than one public service agency that has attempted addressing these children's needs. Child neglect is a significant risk factor for serious juvenile crime. Recurrent reports of maltreatment, multiple placement moves, and repeated spells in foster care present special problems to the juvenile justice system. These juveniles tend to move from child welfare supervised foster care to the Texas Youth Commission. Funding is needed for training for counselors and families in child neglect issues. Continued support and expanded involvement is needed for the various agencies to network regarding these youth.

Child Abuse Focus Group

Mental Health Services

There is not enough low/no cost therapy for children who are victims of abuse and/or neglect.

This is a problem because children who grow up in violent households are more likely to be abused and in turn become violent children, youth and adults. A study completed in 2000 by the Open Society Institute Center of Crime reported that children who witness domestic violence were found to show more anxiety, depression, traumatic symptoms, and temperamental problems than other children did. An earlier study, completed in 1989 and reported by the Journal of Juvenile Justice Digest found that a history of family violence of abuse was the most significant difference between delinquent and non-delinquent youth. Many, many studies link criminals in prison to child abuse or other similar histories of abuse. Its no wonder that effects of child abuse and neglect include child fatalities, juvenile and adult crime, substance abuse, increased need for mental health services, and a decrease in overall social functioning. In many cases, communities must bear a large portion of the weight of the above effects either because they are affected directly, or because they must financially support the services required.

In order to alleviate this problem, Denton County needs more low/no cost therapy for child victims of abuse, including those who are direct victims of abuse and those who have witnessed abuse, as well as for the abusers of these children. As shown above, this pervasive problem, if not dealt with early in a child's life, can have devastating, long-term effects/consequences for the child and society as a whole. The existing agencies in Denton County that offer such services need funds to increase the number of counselors and advocates so more service hours can be offered. More funds are also necessary for agencies such as Child Protective Services so the needs of children in the state's care can be met.

High Attrition Rate for Child Protective Services

There is a moderately high attrition rate of CPS workers and no system for preventing future attrition, supporting caseworkers, recognizing experience, and professional development.

There are four main reasons for this: (1) heavy caseloads, (2) lack of office space and poor working conditions, (3) shortage of volunteer support, and (4) non-competitive salaries. Refer to the chart below for information about caseloads – the numbers speak for themselves.

Caseload	2001 Denton County Abuse Cases Investigated	1,855
	Workers	11
	Ratio (cases per worker) (avg. 14 cases per mo)	169
	Fatalities	2
Caseload	2002 Denton County Abuse Cases Investigated	2,258
	Workers	13
	Ratio (cases per worker) (avg. 14 cases per mo)	174

Caseworkers work in cramped office space with an inadequate phone system and outdated equipment. They do not have the tools or technical support necessary to handle their assigned duties. Volunteers are needed to answer phones, take messages and perform other clerical duties. Salaries are not adequate to compensate for the level of education, experience and long hours required, including “on call” duties of the caseworkers.

In order to alleviate this problem, there needs to be additional funding for more caseworkers, more office space is needed and volunteers are desperately needed to help reduce workloads. There are grants available through the state to fund additional employees. Perhaps the Civil Division of the District Attorney’s Office can assist in writing these grants requests. Perhaps for space, CPS could negotiate with Denton County for office space in the Food Lion Building that was purchased by Denton County and is being renovated for office space for county employees. Senior management could speak to Denton County service organizations (Kiwanis, Lions, Rotary, Denton Young Professionals, etc.) and churches to recruit volunteers and host fund raising events. They could also recruit interns and volunteers from local universities.

Inconsistent Processing

There is inconsistent reporting of and handling of child abuse cases in Denton County with school personnel, law enforcement and medical personnel.

This is a problem because some children who are abused or neglected are not being recognized as such – or, do not feel comfortable seeking help and thus, are not getting the services and support they need to grow and develop in a healthy and safe environment. It is also a problem because professionals have indicated in a local survey that they feel more training in this area is needed. Of those police departments in Denton County that responded to the survey, 100% indicated that they believe more training is needed and more often – most only have training every two years. Of the schools that responded to the local survey, while most indicated annual training, 54% indicated that they felt additional training is needed district wide. Specific concerns they cited include law enforcement’s role, how to report, and the role of CPS.

In order to alleviate this problem, there needs to be a concentrated effort to provide enough training and effective training to the specific professionals that work with children. That training should include information on the signs and symptoms of child abuse, the role of CPS and other service agencies for this population, and the difference in reporting requirements for citizens and professionals. For law enforcement specifically, there is a need for more advanced training regarding child sexual abuse and physical abuse in terms of enforcement and prosecution. This type of education program should be on-going and would require a commitment on the part of current service providers, professionals and some financial resources.

Overload of System

Denton County is experiencing an increase in the number of child abuse referrals and exponentially the number of children in managing conservatorship is increasing.

This is a problem because caseworkers cannot handle the large volume of cases assigned to them, there is a severe shortage of qualified foster homes in Denton County, and caseworkers are required to transport children to visits, etc. which takes time away from their primary duties.

In order to alleviate this problem, we need better parent/teacher education in schools and community programs, we need more funding for Family Outreach Programs to keep families out of the CPS system, and we desperately need volunteers to mentor dysfunctional/undereducated families to empower them to become contributing members of society.

Staff Shortage

There is a severe shortage of CPS caseworkers and administrative support staff in Denton County.

This is a problem because highly trained caseworkers are forced to perform clerical duties, critical casework is delayed, phones go unanswered (there is no voice mail system) and information is not received promptly, and the small number of volunteers that are now available are not reliable.

In order to alleviate this problem, there needs to be more grant funding for additional caseworkers, CPS should raise salaries to reflect adequately the level of education, experience and long hours required, including "on call" duties of the caseworkers, and caseloads need to be reduced for each caseworker to ensure accurate and complete handling.

Youth in Transition

Foster children making the transition from foster care to independent living are at greater risk of homelessness, substance abuse, unwanted pregnancy, and criminal behavior, particularly those who are mentally ill and/or low functioning. The Child Welfare League of America recently reported that 30% of the foster care population is teenagers. In a study completed in 1998, the same organization did an extensive survey of teens 12 to 18 months after they exited foster care. This study proved that these teens have trouble meeting basic needs as follows:

49% were unemployed;

37% had not completed high school (although 90% were attending while still in care);

32% were receiving public assistance (i.e. food stamps, AFDC);

12% had been homeless at least once;

18% had been incarcerated at least once;

25% of males and 15% of females experienced serious physical victimization;

44% had difficulty acquiring needed medical care; and

only 21% were able to continue receiving mental health services (while 47% had been receiving these services prior to discharge).

This is a problem in Denton County as there are no services for these youth to ensure that their transition from foster care to independent living is successful. It is also a problem because the cost to deal with the problems of these youth (as mentioned

above) far outweighs the cost to help them become independent, contributing members of society.

Funding and resources are needed to develop and implement “wrap around” services and at least temporary housing in Denton County for foster children who will “age out” of the child welfare system. These services should begin with the children as soon as possible from age 14 to 18 and should be designed to help the children become self sufficient adults. Services might include: emergency financial assistance, education testing and counseling, tutoring, mentoring, job testing and training, housing assistance, mental health services, medical services, and registration assistance for services (i.e. Medicaid, WIC). Ideally, these services would be in one central county location that is accessible by public transportation.

Abuse Specific Parenting Classes

There is a need for parenting classes that are more effective for parents/care-givers whose children are in the state's custody in order to prevent future abuse and neglect.

This is a problem because the parenting classes offered are generic in nature, applying to many different segments of the community and not geared for dysfunctional/abusive families. The needs of the parents whose children have been removed because of abuse and/or neglect are very different than those of the general population.

In order to alleviate this problem, agencies offering parenting education need to have a special curriculum for dysfunctional families – perhaps one that can be changed depending on the clientele and their specific needs. It's possible that parenting skills need to be taught to some of these parents on a one-on-one basis rather than in a classroom setting. Additional funding may be needed in order to make this happen.

Language Barriers

People who do not speak English have a difficult time navigating the legal, justice and child welfare systems. The United Way of Metropolitan Dallas, in conjunction with the City of Lewisville, completed an extensive Community Needs Assessment, which included Denton County, in 2002. Results of this survey indicate that one out of six people in our region of Texas do not speak English well. A separate needs assessment, completed in 1999, by the City of Denton, the Flow Foundation and the United Way of Denton County identified demographics in Denton County as changing drastically particularly in the growing Hispanic and Asian populations. This study showed that in an eight year time period, the Hispanic population in Denton County grew 65.6 percent while the Asian population increased by 107.2 percent.

This is a problem in Denton County as there is a lack of bilingual service providers (i.e. counselors, therapists, CPS workers, legal system and non-profit service providers) for children and adults. Waiting lists at facilities that do have bilingual staff or translators are long. Many agencies do not have bilingual staff or translators and due to urgency of needs or misunderstanding due to cultural barriers, many individuals do not get the assistance they need. The Denton County Community Plan Child Abuse Focus Group is conducting a brief survey of service providers to determine the level and extent of this

gap in services. That survey is to be completed in October of 2003 with results available in November.

Funding and resources are needed to recruit and train bilingual staff and/or translators so that the Hispanic, Asian and other populations can be better served.

Knowledge of Resources

Foster parents, relative care givers, human service agency personnel and others who provide services to child victims of abuse and neglect in Denton County are not aware of community resources and services that are available to assist in the treatment and care of these children.

This is a huge problem for a variety of reasons. Most importantly, children may go without needed resources as the foster family or other care givers may not have the ability to pay for items or services needed and are not aware of what is available to them without expectation of payment or at reduced cost. Some pay for items or services out of their own pocket thus reducing their ability to provide help needed in other ways.

Two different community needs assessments completed in 1999 and in 2002, identified the need to have a centralized information center with more efficient and effective dissemination of information about available programs and services in order to maximize available resources and to achieve optimum results. Funding and personnel are needed for this to be successful.

Support of Parent Returning to Work

There is a shortage of some and a lack of other support services for foster parents and for parents returning to the workforce, including subsidized childcare facilities and public transportation.

This is a problem for parents who are returning to the workforce after an absence because of the need for support during the transition period. Three different local community needs assessments, one completed in 1999 and the other two in 2002, identified public transportation and available and affordable child care as two of the five most recognized community problems. These problems were identified by social service agency personnel, by community residents and more importantly, by members of our community who need these services. Many parents who are returning to the workforce after an absence are single parents, young parents, parents who have just come from drug/alcohol rehabilitation, parents who have never worked, parents who are escaping an abusive situation or other similar scenarios. They are already facing many barriers to gainful employment and now, have a difficult time in Denton County accessing transportation or locating affordable child care.

In order to alleviate this problem, a public transportation system needs to be developed and in the absence of one, a system for financial assistance for those who need to utilize alternate methods of transportation. Also, funding to expand and create more child care facilities for low income families is desperately needed.

Decreased Resources/Increased Need

The number of documented abused/neglected children in Denton County continues to rise; however, the number of Medicaid providers in Denton County available to care for these children has not kept up with the increase.

Year	Denton County Child Population	Children in CPS Care*	Medicaid Providers (Family Practice/Pediatrics)**	Uninsured under 19**
2001	122,676		321	
2002	125,512		602	24 (As of July 2003) 14,481

*Source: The Texas Kids Count Project-Center for Public Policy Priorities, Austin, TX

**Source: Texas Health and Human Services, Denton, TX

Children that are in CPS care generally suffer from multiple health issues (physical, emotional, mental, dental, etc.) related to the abuse/neglect and they rely on Medicaid to get the treatment they need. When local Medicaid providers are not available, CPS has to transport the children to other counties for care.

Children in CPS care are the responsibility of the State. Without an increase in funding and active recruitment of new Medicaid providers, these children will continue to have to be transported to other counties for care. This places an additional burden on an already overburdened CPS budget and staff. The Texas Legislature needs to provide adequate funding to support the current Medicaid providers and recruit additional providers to treat the high number of children in care.

Substance Abuse Treatment

There is a need for facilities in Denton County that work with substance abuse issues (out-patient treatment is limited and in-patient doesn't exist).

In 2002 there were 1,865 investigations of child abuse/neglect in Denton County which accounted for 574 substantiated victims of child abuse. Drug and alcohol use plays a significant role in households in which child abuse occurs.

In cases of child abuse and neglect in Denton County, Child Protective Services typically requires parents to submit to an alcohol and drug assessment. These assessments are performed in Denton County however, should the perpetrator of abuse require further substance abuse related treatment, they are very limited as to where such treatment may be received. The only detox facilities located in Denton County are through the local private pay hospitals who will only observe someone for 72 hours before they are discharged out into the community. All in-patient substance abuse treatment (alcohol and drugs) referrals made to clients who reside in Denton County must be referred out of county since there are not any in-patient facilities of this type in available. Most persons who fall into this category are limited to treatment programs that either accept Medicaid or provide services for free. Over 90% of the parents whose children have been removed from their custody by Denton County CPS fall into the extremely low income category, or less than or equal to 30% AMI (average median income) and therefore typically don't have funds to subsidize their treatment nor do they have access to reliable transportation to get them to and from their in-patient or out-patient treatment programs.

There are out-patient treatment programs for adults in Denton County but that are limited as well. The greatest limitation is perhaps the prohibitive cost of receiving outpatient treatment. While it is true that most out-patient programs work on a sliding scale fee, the fee typically runs about \$20 a session which equates to over \$150 a month. For adolescents, there are treatment providers organized by the Denton Independent School District that will meet with students for \$5 a session. However, there are also no in-patient substance abuse treatment facilities in the county which serve this population.

There needs to be an increase in the number of conveniently located in-patient substance abuse facilities available to serve residents of Denton County. Such programs need to be state funded and affordable to those who need such services and include detox beds. There also needs to be an increase in the number of affordable out-patient programs available to substance abusers.

Increased Demand for Services

Agencies serving child abuse victims, other than CPS, also have caseloads too large to investigate and supervise the number of children coming into care in Denton County.

This is a problem as service providers are already stretching limited resources in order to meet the demand for services. Many report that even with a tradition of serving 100% of those in need, the demand is growing so rapidly, they will soon have waiting lists and/or not be able to serve all those in need. The Denton County Community Plan Child Abuse Focus Group is conducting a brief survey of service providers to determine the level and extent of this gap in services. That survey is to be completed in October of 2003 with results available in November. One agency has already responded to the survey and reports that they have experienced a 27% increase in demand for services in just the last year. For the previous three years, at least a 12% increase in demand for services has been met. If child victims of abuse go un-served, or have to wait for services, we are delaying and possibly eliminating the possibility of ever helping this population become productive members of society.

In order to alleviate this problem, additional funding is needed to help agencies become adequately staffed to meet the demand for services.

Denton County Community Plan for Criminal Justice Child Abuse Focus Group

The 2003 Child Abuse Focus Group has been very active since being formed May 8, 2003. The group of 16 members met on May 20, June 17, July 8 and July 29. After much brainstorming and discussion, the focus group fully developed 13 problem statements pertinent to Denton County and children and abuse issues, four that need further research, and ten that are areas of concern but not addressable by this group at this time. The following report contains problem statements for the 13 most vital areas of concern at this time (not listed in priority order but numbered so the report is presented in an orderly fashion).

I. Investigation and Prosecution

PROBLEM STATEMENT 1a.

What is the problem?

The rate of prosecuting alleged adult perpetrators of child abuse has decreased in Denton County since 2001.

Why is it a problem?

In 2001, 86% of cases filed against adults for severe child abuse and handled by the specialized child abuse prosecution unit resulted in either confinement or probation. Between 1998 and 2001, the rate of prosecution for cases of child abuse not handled by the specialized child abuse unit fluctuated between 52% and 60%. In 2002 and 2003, the prosecution rate for severe child abuse cases decreased to 61% and 65% respectively. In 2002 and 2003, the prosecution rate for child abuse cases not handled by the specialized child abuse unit decreased to 28.8% and 44.8% respectively.

Cases handled by the specialized unit include child sexual abuse when the child is younger than 14 at the time of outcry, cases involving serious bodily injury to children under 14, sexual abuse of children under 17 when there are multiple victims by a defendant, and child death cases. While the prosecution rates for severe child abuse cases handled by the specialized child abuse prosecution unit increased dramatically from 1996 (8%) to 2001 (86%), the recent decline is a concern. The drop in prosecution rates for the specialized child abuse unit is not necessarily a reflection of the work of that unit. However, it does raise some concerns from the Child Abuse Focus Group about the effectiveness of investigations for severe child abuse cases and other factors.

Cases not handled by the specialized child abuse unit include injury to a child where the injury is not life threatening, most endangering cases, and sexual abuse cases where the victim is 14 or older at the time of outcry. The decrease in prosecution rates to 28.8% (2002) and 44.8% (2003) for cases not handled by the specialized child abuse unit is of major concern. Prosecution rates for the last two years for such cases are the lowest the county has seen since 1996 when the prosecution rate was only 18.9%.

YEAR	SPECIALIZED CHILD ABUSE UNIT PROSECUTION RATE	PROSECUTION RATE FOR OTHER CHILD ABUSE CASES
1996	8.2%	18.9%
1997	59.2%	51.8%

1998	73.7%	60%
1999	27.8%*	52%
2000	74.7%	60%
2001	86%	52.1%
2002	61.5%	28.8%
2003	65%	44.8%

*In 1999, various prosecutors worked severe child abuse cases.

The Children's Advocacy Center for Denton County began providing services in April 1997.

Prosecution rate refers to cases filed where the defendant was convicted.

Children and non-offending family members have a difficult time healing from child abuse without justice. Cases that are filed without prosecution are devastating to the child, family, and the community. When offenders are not held accountable for their crimes against children, the chances of that offender victimizing another child increase.

What needs to occur to alleviate the problem?

The Child Abuse Focus Group also believes the county must continue to have a specialized child abuse prosecution unit within the District Attorney's Office. The specialized unit, originally consisting of one prosecutor and an investigator, has been successful in prosecuting cases since it began in October 1996. The District Attorney's Office may want to consider seeking funding to hire additional prosecutors and investigators to work child abuse cases not currently handled by the specialized unit. Additional staff for the child abuse prosecution unit would increase the prosecution rate for those cases.

A number of other things need to happen to alleviate the problem. Coordination of the investigation must occur among the responsible agencies. The Children's Advocacy Center for Denton County is the non-profit agency in Denton County that helps coordinate the investigation for sexual abuse and severe physical abuse cases. Cases handled by the specialized child abuse prosecution unit are cases where the investigation should have been coordinated through the Children's Advocacy Center. The only cases that should have come through the Advocacy Center but are not handled by the specialized unit are those sexual abuse cases where the victim was older than 14 at the time of outcry. It is important that law enforcement bring all cases involving sexual abuse or serious physical abuse of children through the Advocacy Center. Coordination and information sharing are important in prosecuting offenders.

There must be consistent training of law enforcement agencies regarding investigation of child abuse cases. The Child Abuse Focus Group understand that some law enforcement agencies do not have the resources or personnel to attain specialized training. Therefore, training support must come from external funding sources and other organizations, such as the Children's Advocacy Center and District Attorney's Office. Training must be provided to investigators responsible for working their cases and to their immediate supervisors.

In addition, support must continue for the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners program, which is a specially trained unit of nurses who perform medical and forensic evaluations of child victims. The county may want to consider the feasibility of a child abuse talk force to assist rural law enforcement agencies in the investigation of child abuse cases.

If we reduce/eliminate the problem, what has changed in the county?

If the problem is reduced or eliminated, offenders will be held accountable for their crimes against children. Sexual predators and the like will know that all Denton County agencies are well equipped to provide thorough investigations resulting in probation and confinement of persons who abuse children in our county. Successful prosecutions deter potential offenders from committing future crimes. In addition, child victims and their non-offending family members will be allowed to heal and lead productive lives.

PROBLEM STATEMENT 1b.

What is the problem? There is inconsistent reporting of and handling of child abuse cases in Denton County with school personnel, law enforcement and medical personnel.

Why is it a problem? This is a problem because some children who are abused or neglected are not being recognized as such – or, do not feel comfortable seeking help and thus, are not getting the services and support they need to grow and develop in a healthy and safe environment. It is also a problem because professionals have indicated in a local survey that they feel more training in this area is needed. Of those police departments in Denton County that responded to the survey, 100% indicated that they believe more training is needed and more often – most only have training every two years. Of the schools that responded to the local survey, while most indicated annual training, 54% indicated that they felt additional training is needed district wide. Specific concerns they cited include law enforcement’s role, how to report, and the role of CPS.

What needs to occur to alleviate the problem? In order to alleviate this problem, there needs to be a concentrated effort to provide enough training and effective training to the specific professionals that work with children. That training should include information on the signs and symptoms of child abuse, the role of CPS and other service agencies for this population, and the difference in reporting requirements for citizens and professionals. For law enforcement specifically, there is a need for more advanced training regarding child sexual abuse and physical abuse in terms of enforcement and prosecution. This type of education program should be on-going and would require a commitment on the part of current service providers, professionals and some financial resources.

If we reduce/eliminate the problem, what has changed in the county? If we reduce/eliminate the problem, our county could become a model county in terms of helping child victims of abuse and ultimately, our children would benefit through the assurance that adults who have a role with children on a daily basis are educated and trained to recognize who may need help and know how to seek that for them.

II. Access to Therapy

PROBLEM STATEMENT 2a

What is the problem? There is not enough low/no cost therapy for children and non-offending family members who are victims of abuse and/or neglect.

Why is it a problem? This is a problem because children who grow up in violent households are more likely to be abused and in turn become violent children, youth and

adults. A study completed in 2000 by the Open Society Institute Center of Crime reported that children who witness domestic violence were found to show more anxiety, depression, traumatic symptoms, and temperamental problems than other children did. An earlier study, completed in 1989 and reported by the Journal of Juvenile Justice Digest found that a history of family violence of abuse was the most significant difference between delinquent and non-delinquent youth. Many, many studies link criminals in prison to child abuse or other similar histories of abuse. Its no wonder that effects of child abuse and neglect include child fatalities, juvenile and adult crime, substance abuse, increased need for mental health services, and a decrease in overall social functioning. In many cases, communities must bear a large portion of the weight of the above effects either because they are affected directly, or because they must financially support the services required.

What needs to occur to alleviate the problem? In order to alleviate this problem, Denton County needs more low/no cost therapy for child victims of abuse, including those who are direct victims of abuse and those who have witnessed abuse, as well as for the abusers of these children. As shown above, this pervasive problem, if not dealt with early in a child's life, can have devastating, long-term effects/consequences for the child and society as a whole. The existing agencies in Denton County that offer such services need funds to increase the number of counselors and advocates so more service hours can be offered. More funds are also necessary for agencies such as Child Protective Services so the needs of children in the state's care can be met.

If we reduce/eliminate the problem, what has changed in the county?

Counseling/educational services for this population can reduce the effects of violence against children, which in turn, will allow for healthy child development and ultimately healthy functioning adults. This should also relieve the community of costs to care for the adults as they would be contributing to the welfare of the community instead of relying on it.

PROBLEM STATEMENT 2b

What is the problem? People who do not speak English have a difficult time navigating the legal, justice and child welfare systems. The United Way of Metropolitan Dallas, in conjunction with the City of Lewisville, completed an extensive Community Needs Assessment, which included Denton County, in 2002. Results of this survey indicate that one out of six people in our region of Texas do not speak English well. A separate needs assessment, completed in 1999, by the City of Denton, the Flow Foundation and the United Way of Denton County identified demographics in Denton County as changing drastically particularly in the growing Hispanic and Asian populations. This study showed that in an eight year time period, the Hispanic population in Denton County grew 65.6 percent while the Asian population increased by 107.2 percent.

Why is it a problem? This is a problem in Denton County as there is a lack of bilingual service providers (i.e. counselors, therapists, CPS workers, legal system and non-profit service providers) for children and adults. Waiting lists at facilities that do have bilingual staff or translators are long. Many agencies do not have bilingual staff or translators and due to urgency of needs or misunderstanding due to cultural barriers, many individuals do not get the assistance they need. The Denton County Community Plan Child Abuse Focus Group is conducting a brief survey of service providers to determine the level and

extent of this gap in services. That survey is to be completed in October of 2003 with results available in November.

What needs to occur to alleviate the problem? Funding and resources are needed to recruit and train bilingual staff and/or translators so that the Hispanic, Asian and other populations can be better served.

If we reduce/eliminate the problem, what has changed in the county? If we are able to provide needed services in identified languages and with cultural sensitivities, we increase our chances of engaging these populations in the work force and in productive community activities.

PROBLEM STATEMENT 2c

What is the problem? There is a need for parenting classes that are more effective for parents/care-givers whose children are in the state's custody in order to prevent future abuse and neglect.

Why is it a problem? This is a problem because the parenting classes offered are generic in nature, applying to many different segments of the community and not geared for dysfunctional/abusive families. The needs of the parents whose children have been removed because of abuse and/or neglect are very different than those of the general population.

What needs to occur to alleviate the problem? In order to alleviate this problem, agencies offering parenting education need to have a special curriculum for dysfunctional families – perhaps one that can be changed depending on the clientele and their specific needs. It's possible that parenting skills need to be taught to some of these parents on a one-on-one basis rather than in a classroom setting. Additional funding may be needed in order to make this happen.

If we reduce/eliminate the problem, what has changed in the county? If we reduce/eliminate the problem, we increase the chances of parents and children being reunited and having healthy home situations – thus, reducing the likelihood of future abuse and/or neglect.

III. Child Protective Services

PROBLEM STATEMENT 3a.

What is the problem? There is a moderately high attrition rate of CPS workers and no system for preventing future attrition, supporting caseworkers, recognizing experience, and professional development.

Why is it a problem? There are four main reasons for this: (1) heavy caseloads, (2) lack of office space and poor working conditions, (3) shortage of volunteer support, and (4) non-competitive salaries. Refer to the chart below for information about caseloads – the numbers speak for themselves.

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	Ratio (cases per worker) (avg. 14 cases per mo)	174
	Fatalities	2

Caseworkers work in cramped office space with an inadequate phone system and outdated equipment. They do not have the tools or technical support necessary to handle their assigned duties. Volunteers are needed to answer phones, take messages and perform other clerical duties. Salaries are not adequate to compensate for the level of education, experience and long hours required, including “on call” duties of the caseworkers.

What needs to occur to alleviate the problem? In order to alleviate this problem, there needs to be additional funding for more caseworkers, more office space is needed and volunteers are desperately needed to help reduce workloads. There are grants available through the state to fund additional employees. Perhaps the Civil Division of the District Attorney’s Office can assist in writing these grants requests. Perhaps for space, CPS could negotiate with Denton County for office space in the Food Lion Building that was purchased by Denton County and is being renovated for office space for county employees. Senior management could speak to Denton County service organizations (Kiwanis, Lions, Rotary, Denton Young Professionals, etc.) and churches to recruit volunteers and host fund raising events. They could also recruit interns and volunteers from local universities.

If we reduce/eliminate the problem, what has changed in the county? The County and abused children will benefit from CPS caseworkers who are not stressed out. Morale will be uplifted by working in a clean, safe environment with adequate office equipment. Employees will feel valued and content to make CPS work their career. Volunteers will assume clerical duties and minister to children who have been removed from their parents.

PROBLEM STATEMENT 3b.

What is the problem? Denton County is experiencing an increase in the number of child abuse referrals and exponentially the number of children in managing conservatorship is increasing.

Why is it a problem? This is a problem because caseworkers cannot handle the large volume of cases assigned to them, there is a severe shortage of qualified foster homes in Denton County, and caseworkers are required to transport children to visits, etc. which takes time away from their primary duties.

What needs to occur to alleviate the problem? In order to alleviate this problem, we need better parent/teacher education in schools and community programs, we need more funding for Family Outreach Programs to keep families out of the CPS system, and we desperately need volunteers to mentor dysfunctional/undereducated families to empower them to become contributing members of society.

If we reduce/eliminate the problem, what has changed in the county? If we reduce/eliminate the problem, there will be fewer abused/neglected children. Additionally, better educated parents will be contributing to the education and care of their children. There will be a reduced caseload for CPS workers and there will be less financial drain on federal, state and local agencies.

PROBLEM STATEMENT 3c.

What is the problem? There is a severe shortage of CPS caseworkers and administrative support staff in Denton County.

Why is it a problem? This is a problem because highly trained caseworkers are forced to perform clerical duties, critical casework is delayed, phones go unanswered (there is no voice mail system) and information is not received promptly, and the small number of volunteers that are now available are not reliable.

What needs to occur to alleviate the problem? In order to alleviate this problem, there needs to be more grant funding for additional caseworkers, CPS should raise salaries to reflect adequately the level of education, experience and long hours required, including "on call" duties of the caseworkers, and caseloads need to be reduced for each caseworker to ensure accurate and complete handling.

If we reduce/eliminate the problem, what has changed in the county? If we reduce/eliminate the problem, there will be a shorter response time for investigations/removal of abused children, there will be increased quality of work performed, stress will be reduced causing increased confidence and satisfaction with job assignment, there will be more protection and attention for abused/neglected children, and dysfunctional families can be rehabilitated and contribute to the community.

IV. Support Services.

PROBLEM STATEMENT 4a.

What is the problem? Agencies serving child abuse victims, other than CPS, also have caseloads too large to investigate and supervise the number of children coming into care in Denton County.

Why is it a problem? This is a problem as service providers are already stretching limited resources in order to meet the demand for services. Many report that even with a tradition of serving 100% of those in need, the demand is growing so rapidly, they will soon have waiting lists and/or not be able to serve all those in need. The Denton County Community Plan Child Abuse Focus Group is conducting a brief survey of service providers to determine the level and extent of this gap in services. That survey is to be completed in October of 2003 with results available in November. One agency has

already responded to the survey and reports that they have experienced a 27% increase in demand for services in just the last year. For the previous three years, at least a 12% increase in demand for services has been met. If child victims of abuse go un-served, or have to wait for services, we are delaying and possibly eliminating the possibility of ever helping this population become productive members of society.

What needs to occur to alleviate the problem? In order to alleviate this problem, additional funding is needed to help agencies become adequately staffed to meet the demand for services.

If we reduce/eliminate the problem, what has changed in the county? If we reduce/eliminate this problem, abused/neglected children will have a greater opportunity and likelihood of surviving the abuse and becoming productive community members. Hopefully, we will be able to break the abusive cycle and decrease the future need for such services.

PROBLEM STATEMENT 4b.

What is the problem? Foster children making the transition from foster care to independent living are at greater risk of homelessness, substance abuse, unwanted pregnancy, and criminal behavior, particularly those who are mentally ill and/or low functioning. The Child Welfare League of America recently reported that 30% of the foster care population is teenagers. In a study completed in 1998, the same organization did an extensive survey of teens 12 to 18 months after they exited foster care. This study proved that these teens have trouble meeting basic needs as follows: 49% were unemployed; 37% had not completed high school (although 90% were attending while still in care); 32% were receiving public assistance (i.e. food stamps, AFDC); 12% had been homeless at least once; 18% had been incarcerated at least once; 25% of males and 15% of females experienced serious physical victimization; 44% had difficulty acquiring needed medical care; and only 21% were able to continue receiving mental health services (while 47% had been receiving these services prior to discharge).

Why is it a problem? This is a problem in Denton County as there are no services for these youth to ensure that their transition from foster care to independent living is successful. It is also a problem because the cost to deal with the problems of these youth (as mentioned above) far outweighs the cost to help them become independent, contributing members of society.

What needs to occur to alleviate the problem? Funding and resources are needed to develop and implement “wrap around” services and at least temporary housing in Denton County for foster children who will “age out” of the child welfare system. These services should begin with the children as soon as possible from age 14 to 18 and should be designed to help the children become self sufficient adults. Services might include: emergency financial assistance, education testing and counseling, tutoring, mentoring, job testing and training, housing assistance, mental health services, medical services, and registration assistance for services (i.e. Medicaid, WIC). Ideally, these

services would be in one central county location that is accessible by public transportation.

If we reduce/eliminate the problem, what has changed in the county? The homeless population will be reduced, there will be less prostitution among youth and less unwanted pregnancies, fewer young adults will be involved in criminal activity and there will be fewer youth who turn to drugs and/or alcohol. Many of these young adults will become self sufficient and contribute to the overall well-being of our community – rather than becoming an offending adult in our court system.

PROBLEM STATEMENT 4c.

What is the problem? Foster parents, relative care givers, human service agency personnel and others who provide services to child victims of abuse and neglect in Denton County are not aware of community resources and services that are available to assist in the treatment and care of these children.

Why is it a problem? This is a huge problem for a variety of reasons. Most importantly, children may go without needed resources as the foster family or other care givers may not have the ability to pay for items or services needed and are not aware of what is available to them without expectation of payment or at reduced cost. Some pay for items or services out of their own pocket thus reducing their ability to provide help needed in other ways.

What needs to occur to alleviate the problem? Two different community needs assessments completed in 1999 and in 2002, identified the need to have a centralized information center with more efficient and effective dissemination of information about available programs and services in order to maximize available resources and to achieve optimum results. Funding and personnel are needed for this to be successful.

If we reduce/eliminate the problem, what has changed in the county? Many of the needs of children in foster or alternative care will be met – without delay and without major difficulty in accessing them on the part of the care givers. This will give these children the same opportunities to grow and develop as other children in the community do.

PROBLEM STATEMENT 4d.

What is the problem? There is a shortage of some and a lack of other support services for foster parents and for parents returning to the workforce, including subsidized childcare facilities and public transportation.

Why is it a problem? This is a problem for parents who are returning to the workforce after an absence because of the need for support during the transition period. Three different local community needs assessments, one completed in 1999 and the other two in 2002, identified public transportation and available and affordable child care as two of the five most recognized community problems. These problems were identified by social service agency personnel, by community residents and more importantly, by members of our community who need these services. Many parents who are returning to the workforce after an absence are single parents, young parents, parents who have just come from drug/alcohol rehabilitation, parents who have never worked, parents who are

escaping an abusive situation or other similar scenarios. They are already facing many barriers to gainful employment and now, have a difficult time in Denton County accessing transportation or locating affordable child care.

What needs to occur to alleviate the problem? In order to alleviate this problem, a public transportation system needs to be developed and in the absence of one, a system for financial assistance for those who need to utilize alternate methods of transportation. Also, funding to expand and create more child care facilities for low income families is desperately needed.

If we reduce/eliminate the problem, what has changed in the county? If we reduce/eliminate this problem, our county will have less families relying on welfare assistance programs and more families contributing financially to the health of our community.

PROBLEM STATEMENT 4e.

What is the Problem? The number of documented abused/neglected children in Denton County continues to rise; however, the number of Medicaid providers in Denton County available to care for these children has not kept up with the increase.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Denton County Child Population*</u>	<u>Children in CPS Care*</u>	<u>Medicaid Providers (Family Practice/Pediatrics)**</u>
<u>Uninsured under 19**</u>			
2001	122,676	321	
2002	125,512	602	24 (As of July 2003)
	14,481		

*Source: The Texas Kids Count Project-Center for Public Policy Priorities, Austin, TX

**Source: Texas Health and Human Services, Denton, TX

Why is it a problem? Children that are in CPS care generally suffer from multiple health issues (physical, emotional, mental, dental, etc.) related to the abuse/neglect and they rely on Medicaid to get the treatment they need. When local Medicaid providers are not available, CPS has to transport the children to other counties for care.

What needs to occur to alleviate the problem? Children in CPS care are the responsibility of the State. Without an increase in funding and active recruitment of new Medicaid providers, these children will continue to have to be transported to other counties for care. This places an additional burden on an already overburdened CPS budget and staff. The Texas Legislature needs to provide adequate funding to support the current Medicaid providers and recruit additional providers to treat the high number of children in care.

If we reduce/eliminate the problem, what has changed in the county? Increasing the number of Medicaid providers would reduce the backlog of children needing healthcare. In addition, CPS will not have to utilize valuable staff time and the constrained CPS budget to transport the children to different counties for care. It is anticipated that the long term effect of getting these children healthy physically, mentally and emotionally will be a reduction in the number of children who come into care in the

future as healthy children are better able to learn how to break the cycle of abuse/neglect.
