

PALO PINTO COUNTY

**COMMUNITY
PLAN**

FY 2005

Law Enforcement Personnel and Training

Communications

Inter-agency communications is hindered for a number of reasons: lack of one central agency or individual responsible for coordinating inter-agency efforts and information, and lack of coordination in communications technology. In the event of a major disaster, the ability to have a coordinated multi-agency response would almost be impossible. Responding agencies in Palo Pinto County need additional resources and equipment to effectively communicate between various radio systems and between various agencies. A standardized communications system would allow governments to share information in case of a situation that threatened Homeland Security. The equipment needed may include, but is not limited to: enhancements to existing radio systems and equipment. Emergency responders will need training in the use of the new equipment. Increased radio operability will provide for a more timely, coordinated and safe response through Palo Pinto County. This enhanced response will save money, time and lives.

Technology

Difficulty maintaining pace with advancing technology, including equipment, training, education, and advancing technological skills by criminals makes it difficult to track and prosecute crimes (computer crimes, child pornography, exploitation of women and children, identity theft). Local law enforcement agencies have inadequate technology to properly investigate crimes. Local law enforcement will need updated or enhanced computer capabilities that include, but are not limited to: desktop computers, laptop computers, mobile data computers, servers, updated software, and an automatic fingerprint system. With the update of technology Palo Pinto County will have the means to properly investigate and track down criminals. Eventually the creation of an onsite crime lab would result in shorter, more thorough investigations. With the addition of updated technology, Palo Pinto County law enforcement agencies would need additional resources and specialized training to effectively utilize equipment. Enhancing technology and training would result in quicker apprehension and identification of criminal offenders.

Fingerprint Processing

Law Enforcement personnel are required by statute to complete a CR-43/44 or CR-43J/44J form when an individual is arrested on a Class B misdemeanor or higher charge. Each form has to be handwritten by law enforcement personnel, taking away valuable patrol time of the officer. There is no way to immediately identify criminals that are already entered in the system. Palo Pinto County would benefit from a system that scans the arrested person's fingerprints into the Identix system and downloads the information directly into the Department of Public Safety database. This would also provide immediate identification of the offender. The fingerprinting system could be shared with other agencies in surrounding municipalities including those in surrounding counties to properly identify criminals that are known in the statewide database. This system would increase community policing, provide quicker identification of criminals, and increase networking with other agencies.

Illegal Disposal of Hazardous Waste Material

Illegal home methamphetamine labs are a growing problem in Palo Pinto County and in surrounding areas. A need exists in Palo Pinto County to enhance technology, training, and personnel for drug enforcement agencies. Methamphetamine labs combine household chemicals into a dangerous concoction that release poisonous gas and hazardous waste. Hazardous waste produced by methamphetamine labs is usually disposed of in nearby streams, rivers, and lakes or poured directly onto the ground. This is a hazard to humans, animals, and the environment. The Narcotics Task Force calls on the DEA hazardous material team to dispose of all visible materials at the scene. There is no method of disposing of hazardous waste material that has been dumped on the ground or cleaning water sources that have been polluted by illegal waste. There is a need for the development and utilization of technology that will clean up areas polluted by illegal disposal of chemicals. This will alleviate the damaging side effects of hazardous waste to humans, animals and agriculture in the future. Task Force Officers contract with either the DEA hazardous material team or private contractors to remove visible illegal waste from home methamphetamine labs. Task Force officers are required to man the area for up to 24 hours until the DEA team arrives. This leaves the Task Force short on officers and hampers their ability to perform other duties. There is a need for specialized Task Force officers to aid in the clean up and disposal of hazardous waste.

Mental Health Treatment

Both the increase in and change in type of population has led to increased need for mental health treatment. The decrease in State funding for mental health services, and lack of significant numbers of providers in the private sector is also a problem. A large percentage of the people who need treatment are in the lower income brackets. There are no local in-patient treatment facilities or halfway houses that deal strictly with people with mental health issues. There are no day treatment-type programs in this community, other than the skills training groups that are provided by the local Mental Health and Mental Retardation (MHMR). Additional resources are always needed for additional staff, especially to provide on-going counseling services that the MHMR center is unable to provide due to budget constraints.

Services for juveniles are limited due to the same budgetary constraints. Services are limited in part to the most severe cases, leaving a large part of the youth in need to search for the few services that are available. Bed spaces are very limited for in-patient treatment, especially for the indigent population.

In summary, in all areas of mental health treatment more could be done if additional resources were available.

Substance Abuse

The use of illegal drugs and alcohol abuse in rural communities continues to increase causing injury, disability or death to users, increased crime rates, and decreased family bonds and values. Law enforcement in Palo Pinto County lacks the resources to prevent the use and manufacture of illegal drugs and to monitor convicted drunk drivers. Palo Pinto County law enforcement agencies require additional resources, training, and qualified personnel to prevent the manufacturing and use of illegal drugs including, but not limited to, body worn microphones, digital cameras, digital recording devices, computers, laptop computers, software, video equipment, surveillance equipment, radios, canines, canine equipment, telephones and monitoring devices. These additional resources and qualified personnel will increase the

effectiveness of narcotics investigations and will help ensure a successful prosecution and subsequent monitoring. Investigations can include, but are not limited to, methamphetamine labs (methamphetamine lab clean-up), DUI checkpoints, street level distribution, and other offenses related to illegal narcotics and alcohol abuse. Law enforcement, the drug and alcohol council, school districts, media, the university, faith and community groups all make efforts to prevent and/or reduce the illegal use of drugs and alcohol by youth and young adults, but each lack the personnel to consistently coordinate their efforts. A community facilitator is required to coordinate a balanced approach to illegal drugs and alcohol use prevention and intervention. Treatment programs that offer education, counseling, job search training, group support, identification and referral to mental health agencies, 24/7 crisis intervention and abstinence incentive procedures are necessary to facilitate the recovery process for addicted persons and their families. The reduction in the use of illegal drugs, proper enforcement of DUI laws, the treatment of those addicted and the support of those in recovery will increase our community's standard of living while decreasing the enforcement, health, education and employment costs associated with illegal drug and alcohol use and trafficking.

Family Violence/Sexual Assault

The number of incidents of family violence and sexual assault is increasing. According to the Mineral Wells Police Department (MWRPD) and the Palo Pinto County Sheriff's Office (PPSO), the following is the number of Family Violence incidents called in to dispatch/911 beginning with the year 2000:

	MWRPD	PPSO
2000		20
2001		22
2002		30
2003		40 (as of 10/13/03)

The information about the number of Family Violence incidents called in to the dispatch/911 is not available from the MWRPD because they do not differentiate other assaults from Family Violence incidents at that point.

The number of Sexual Assault incidents called in to dispatch/911:

	MWRPD	PPSO	TOTAL
2000	11	17	27
2001	6	21	27
2002	12	19	31
2003	17	12	29 (as of 10/13/03)

According to the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR), the following is the number of Family Violence incidents reported to DPS:

	MWRPD	PPSO	TOTAL
2000	175	29	204
2001	151	22	173
2002	186	22	208

The number of Sexual Assault (Rape) incidents reported to DPS:

	MWRPD	PPSO	TOTAL
2000	9	3	12
2001	24	0	24

The numbers for 2003 will not be available from DPS until well into 2004.

Those who work directly with victims of Family Violence or Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault are well aware that the majority of incidents of either one are rarely ever reported to law enforcement, especially Sexual Assault incidents between significant others/intimate partners, due in large part to the power-and-control nature of Family Violence and Sexual Assault. That being stated, by looking at the number of incidents called in to dispatch/911 already for this year, indicates that there will very likely be an increase in the totals for 2003. Therefore, it is vital that victims first have knowledge about the services that are available to them in this community/county and then have access to those services. It is also critical that treatment for victims and prevention of re-victimization is not simply acknowledged, but actively sought on behalf of the victims. Any barriers victims face in learning about services offered, accessing or receiving services/treatment need to be identified, and addressed as soon as possible.

Community response to victims of Family Violence/Sexual Assault needs to include:

- coordinated crisis intervention
- trained officers regarding the dynamics of Family Violence and Sexual Assault
- law enforcement with adequate technology to properly investigate Family Violence and Sexual Assault cases
- coordinated investigation with appropriate agencies
- victims advised of their rights and services available
- record all 911 calls and retain Family Violence and Sexual Assault calls for prosecution
- appropriate investigative follow-up (i.e. pictures of victims 2-4 days later to record scope of injuries)
- magistrates need to assess danger to the victim when considering bail amount and/or jail time
- county/district attorney will coordinate victim advocacy and support services during investigation and court proceedings with victims and their families
- inform victims and advocates of court proceedings
- victims impact information gathered at the misdemeanor level
- obtain training for grand jury regarding the dynamics of Family Violence and Sexual Assault
- obtain convictions in misdemeanor and felony level and findings of Family Violence
- criminal court will provide swift incarceration if evidence is beyond a reasonable doubt
- criminal court will insure swift action including incarceration without possibility of bail if a violation occurs while the offender is on probation
- probation department will provide specialized officers for Family Violence and Sexual Assault offenders
- probation department will assure that the defendant abide by the terms of probation
- probation department will assure swift filing of motion to revoke with arrest warrant, if the offender violates probation
- hospital will allow victim advocates to support the victim in the exam room
- hospital will collect forensic evidence and appropriately transfer custody to law enforcement investigators
- hospital staff will appear before the grand jury and at criminal proceedings to confirm evidence collection

Child Abuse

In relation to those working with cases of child abuse, there is a definite need for a local drug-testing lab where people can be observed during urine drug screens. The local hospital offers no supervision therefore leaving the results suspect.

For child victims, the community would benefit from a Court-Appointed Special Advocate program (CASA).

Child victims of sexual assault, law enforcement, and a variety of social agencies would benefit from having a local Child Advocacy Center where the necessary people would be on hand when an outcry is made. This would automatically reduce the number of times the child victim is revictimized by having to repeat the outcry to all the appropriate entities assisting the victim. Single parents in this community would benefit from a 24-hour child-care program that meets licensing standards that would accommodate all work schedules including weekends.

One of the biggest needs in this community is an affordable transportation option that reaches to all corners of the county.

Victims Needs

The figures given in other sections give some idea of the number of victims of various types of crimes there are in Palo Pinto County. With the number of victims it is important to note that there is only one active Presumptive Eligibility worker in Palo Pinto County who has been trained by the Crime Victims' Compensation Division of the Office of the Attorney General. The County Attorney and the District Attorney offices each have their designated Victim Assistance Coordinators and the MWP and the PPSO have their requisite Victim Liaisons as is mandated by the Code of Criminal Procedure (CCP) Art. 56.04 (a) and (c). Because these designations are but a small portion of their job descriptions, their ability to give attention to victims' needs is very limited. Therefore, one possible solution is for both prosecutorial offices to collaborate to create a position specifically designed to focus on victims' needs and provide court accompaniment for victims and their families and have that person be the designated Victim Assistance Coordinator. If the MWP and PPSO also collaborated to create a position specifically focused on the needs of victims, that person could be the designated Victim Liaison and could then be very active in disseminating resource information and assisting victims in accessing a major financial resource, Crime Victims' Compensation, by becoming a Presumptive Eligibility worker.

The needs of children as primary as well as secondary victims should be addressed. They need treatment, therapeutic rehabilitation, and coordination with appropriate school personnel when applicable.

Juvenile Crime

Palo Pinto County has identified several problem areas that exist in their population with regard to juvenile justice issues. Juvenile crime involves more than just the child and the child's family. It also involves the larger community. In the community reside many of the causal factors as well as solutions to juvenile crime. The juvenile justice system and all that work along side it

must actively seek to reach both (1) youth at-risk of entering the system and (2) provide services for youth already in the system at one phase or another.

Palo Pinto County has, within the past 11 years, experienced a mild population growth. According to demographers, however, this small level of growth will not continue. Demographers predict Mineral Wells and Palo Pinto County will be engrafted into the metroplex in the next decade. This approaching reality will increase the number of referrals to the local juvenile justice agencies, including local law enforcement. Using this forecast as an impetus for a strategic plan, one element of this plan should include the incremental development of an infrastructure that provides a continuum of services that provides programming for the prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of juveniles who are at-risk of initially or further penetrating the juvenile justice system.

To enlarge on the above statement, total population in Palo Pinto County increased from 24,842 to 27,306 from 1992 to 2002, which reflects a 9.9% increase. With any increase in total population, an increase in juvenile age population is inevitable. Palo Pinto County has experienced a 12% increase in the number of juveniles that are within the age range for jurisdiction of the juvenile court system. Conversely, Parker County and Johnson County have experienced over a 30% increase in total population and juveniles within the scope of the juvenile justice system. As the metroplex expands in concentric zones, Palo Pinto County is expected to encounter the same issues of growth that the interior counties of the metroplex have experienced.

While these increases in juvenile age population increase the number of referrals to the juvenile system (which includes local law enforcement agencies, local prosecution offices, juvenile services, and the courts, including Justice of the Peace Courts, Municipal Courts, and the Juvenile and District Courts), a more immediate concern is the recent trends of increased substance abuse related offenses/activity and crimes with the element of violence:

	<u>1993</u>	<u>1998</u>	<u>2001</u>
Drug Offenses	1	2	8
Violent Offenses	<u>14</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>27</u>
TOTAL Delinquent Conduct	83	84	87

As one can see, the total number of referrals for delinquent conduct has remained relatively consistent until recently. Conversely, the number of referrals for drug offenses remains small but has grown exponentially... Moreover, 40% of youth supervised by the juvenile probation department were positive for an illegal or controlled substance in 2002. Substance abuse is a common thread when adult or juvenile crime is addressed. The over 100% increase in referrals for violent offenses is potentially alarming if the trend continues.

Juvenile offenders typically have problems within their families and schools. In Palo Pinto County, the percent of children that live in a household where a female is the householder with no husband present is 33.6%. Children who live at or below the poverty level equal 12.3%. The proportion of children that receive special education services in Palo Pinto County is 18.7%. The proportion of children that have dropped out of school in Palo Pinto County is 2.7%. However, the dropout rate is mask by the new phenomenon of students “enrolling in home school” and then discontinuing their education. Palo Pinto County Justice of the Peace Courts indicate that they process between 200 to 250 cases for failure to attend school each year.

Although these elements listed are not sure indicators of future delinquent conduct, they are all contributing factors and some demonstrate the youth's weak bond to the primary pathway of success—education.

The Criminal Justice Policy Council estimates that referrals to juvenile justice officials along with the population will be on the rise within the next few years. In 2001, Palo Pinto County has already experienced a 32% increase in total referrals from 103 in 2000 to 136 in 2001. At the writing of this report in October of 2003, there are already 140 referrals.

The above problems identified are representative of the breakdown in the family structure and other institutions of society. Material weaknesses in the juvenile justice system that undermine its ability to address the devolution of society include but are not limited to:

- Lack of appropriate accountability for offenders at all levels of the system;
- Lack of consequences for offenders at all levels of the system;
- Lack of available bed-space for pre-adjudication offenders;
- Lack of adequate supervision from parents;
- Lack of adequate supervision for children with a court disposition;
- Lack of coordination of efforts between agencies and organizations to serve at-risk youth;
- Lack of programs for at-risk youth;
- Lack of faith based programs;
- Lack of programs specific to the needs of parents, children and officials;
- Lack of quality training for law enforcement officials.

Ways to Increase Coordination

All identified resources must examine the level of commitment and the need to focus efforts toward prevention and then make recommendations in the development and accomplishment of action plans using available resources or applying for additional resources. The recruitment of additional agencies and organizations is vital to bring institutional knowledge to the table and aid in identifying and meeting the needs of youth and families. The importance of coalitions and the coordination of resources are even more crucial due to the underdeveloped nature of resources in Palo Pinto County. Furthermore, in the interest of fairness and well-being to the youth and families served, it is important that any program developed in the larger cities of the county is reasonably accessible to the smaller, more remote communities.

Gaps In Services

- Programs and services that address early intervention, education, prevention measures and awareness about the risk factors contributing to juvenile delinquency
- Affordable and adequate mental health and substance abuse facilities aimed at juvenile delinquents
- Accessible and affordable transportation to facilitate service delivery
- Accessible local or contractual emergency shelter for runaway and family intervention
- Projects that provide for the addition of law enforcement officers, prosecutors, juvenile probation officers, and support staff to compensate for the high demand of juvenile referrals
- Programs to provide additional school resource officers
- Projects that provide for the additional personnel for transport to and from facilities and programs

- Projects to provide for truancy officers and equipment to investigate and enforce truancy violations
- Programs, services and alternative sentencing options that are aimed at rehabilitating the juvenile and complying with the Texas Family Code Progressive Sanctions Guidelines
- Education programs for parents in providing quality parenting skills and alternatives to involvement in the juvenile justice system
- Affordable or free after school programs that provide for supervision and services for “latch key kids”
- Recreational programs for at risk youth
- Esteem building programs for at risk youth
- Local projects that address the specific problems of teen pregnancy and provide services

Community Planning Members

Jed Jutte, Palo Pinto County Juvenile Services

Danny Boitnott, Star Council on Substance Abuse

Joanne Kovac-Roberts, Hope, Inc.

Cheryl Berry, Hope, Inc.

Janice Byrd, Pecan Valley MHMR

Jerry White, Mineral Wells Police Department

Colleen Sells, Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services-CPS