

HOOD COUNTY

CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMUNITY PLAN

FY2005

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Hood County Community Plan FY 2005

I. VICTIM SERVICES

Economic Factors:

Hood County, Texas is a rapidly growing, predominately white rural community with a wide disparity between the “haves” and “have nots.” The majority of the population lives in high risk, low-income mobile home parks scattered throughout the county. While the growing population has increased by 9% over the last two years, the unemployment rate in Hood County has increased by 181% during this same two-year period. While only 8% of the population is Hispanic, the number of Hispanics moving to Hood County is increasing. Many of these individuals do not speak English, and most service providers have few Spanish speaking staff or volunteers. Moreover, almost all Hispanics in the area live at or below the poverty level. Of the 58,000 people residing in Hood County during 2003, 8.5% live below federal poverty guidelines, and over 20.5% live within 180% of poverty guidelines. Approximately 33% of children are eligible for free or reduced lunch programs. For low-income families and the “working poor,” the only major employer in the area is Wal-Mart, and that company is currently reducing hours and laying-off employees.

In addition to an increasing number of people living in poverty and those struggling with unemployment in Hood County, the rapidly growing population has already out-paced the number of job opportunities. Many low-income individuals must travel to the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex—at a minimum a 76-mile round trip drive from Hood County—to find work. Many more low-income individuals are unable to seek work in the Metroplex because they have no or unreliable transportation. There is no public transportation in Hood County at this time.

As a result of these economic hardships, the number of homeless people—including families with children—is increasing dramatically. Since January 2003, the number of people who are homeless has increased by 67% and there has been a 33% increase in the number of low-income families who are at-risk of becoming homeless. The children who are at-risk of becoming homeless are also at-risk for a plethora of problems, one of the most serious of which is family violence.

Over 75% of the people living in Hood County have some experience with domestic violence according to recent survey results published by the Texas Council on Family Violence. The number one concern expressed by the 500 members of the Boys & Girls Club (ages 8 through 18) during November of 2002 is “expressing angry or aggressive behavior towards others.”

The complex socioeconomic problems resulting from poverty, unemployment, and domestic violence are compounded by lack of affordable health care. Over 28% of the people living in Hood County—over 12,586 men, women, and children—have no access to primary health care except Ruth’s Place, a free clinic developed through a collaboration between the Hood County Hospital District, the United Way of Hood County, Mission Granbury, Inc., and volunteer physicians. This number includes the 3,472 individuals enrolled in Medicaid because local physicians have full panels or do

not take Medicaid patients. The remaining 9,114 individuals have no health insurance and lack the financial resources to pay for private care.

This data describes a grim socioeconomic reality that is compounded by the fact that this is a resource poor, rural area. This information describes the context in which the community must enhance existing victims' services in order to keep pace with the increasing need for services as well as to develop additional programs to fill significant gaps in services to victims of crime.

Child Abuse and Neglect:

Child abuse and neglect cases continue to increase throughout Hood County; however, Child Protective Services (CPS) staff that supervise the cases and law enforcement officers that investigate these cases have not increased proportionately. The number of CPS investigations assigned for the years 2001 and 2002 is 421 and 453 respectively. This is compounded by a decrease in state funding to CPS. As with all areas of victims' services, the numbers are going up and funding is going down. Due to decreases in state funds, the Hood County CPS office has lost 1 position, and 4 more positions in a 6 county radius are targeted for elimination through attrition.

Hood County needs additional resources to investigate child abuse and neglect cases and personnel to effectively provide adequate supervision once the case is assigned to CPS.

The addition of these investigators and supervisory personnel will increase the effectiveness of the investigation and supervision of child abuse and neglect cases that will result in the protection of the victims and insure accountability to the perpetrators. However, an increase in these resources must be accompanied by increase in resources for transportation to counseling, evaluations, and family visits; translation services for non-English speaking victims and parents; counseling for non-offending parents and victims where abuse occurred; ongoing training and education for investigators; and officers to monitor and enforce protective orders.

Family Violence:

Requests for counseling and advocacy services have increased by 8% during the last year. Requests for emergency shelter for battered women and their children have increased by 30%. Consequently, workloads have increased significantly while staffing levels have remained the same. In addition to legal assistance and victims' advocacy services, over 75% of both resident and non-resident clients who are victims of family violence require emergency financial assistance.

To meet the growing need for services, additional personnel resources are needed to provide personal advocacy, therapeutic counseling, emergency assistance casework, and comprehensive case management to insure a continuum of care after leaving the shelter or non-resident counseling.

Since August of 2003, the Mission Granbury Shelter Center has been at maximum capacity.

Violence Prevention & Non-Violent Conflict Resolution:

Community education and training are necessary to enhance awareness of family violence and how the community can respond to assist victims of crime; however, existing resources are stretched to their limit offering basic education through bi-annual trainings. Additional resources are needed to enhance community education initiatives.

To address the core problems resulting in family violence, comprehensive violence prevention and non-violent conflict resolution training programs are needed as well as additional mentoring programs for adults and children. Research indicates that one of the most effective forms of violence prevention is mentoring programs that teach healthy relationships, self-sufficiency, and self-esteem to children and adults who have opportunities to interact with positive role models. Additional comprehensive violence prevention and mentoring programs are needed in Hood County. Another gap in services is a lack of services for men, especially a batterer's intervention program—there are none. Thus, to summarize, additional resources are needed to develop innovative violence prevention programs including

- Non-Violent Conflict Resolution for adults, youth, and children;
- Batterers Intervention for men; and
- Mentoring for at-risk youth and adults.

Sexual Assault Program:

Only minimal services are available for survivors of sexual assault in Hood County. A needs assessment should be done to determine how best to develop victims' assistance services specifically designed to help victims of sexual assault to include advocacy; victim sensitivity training for law enforcement, criminal justice officials, and medical personnel; providing a SANE and therapeutic counseling for adults, children, and adults molested as children.

Spanish Language Training and Translators:

Non-profit and government organizations providing services to victims of crime are in dire need of Spanish language training and translators because of the rapid growth of non-English speaking individuals moving into Hood County. The most desirable solution, hiring bi-lingual staff, is a challenge because agencies do not have funds for additional employees. Moreover, it is difficult to recruit professionals—pay scales fall below those for comparable work in the Metroplex and the cost of living is the same if not higher. Training existing personnel in basic Spanish to facilitate bi-linugal communication would allow professionals and para-professionals to communicate more effectively in the provision of crime victims' services.

Mental Health Treatment:

The increase in the population contributes to the increase of victims who are in need of mental health treatment and therapeutic counseling. All too often, those most in need cannot afford the cost of care. Decreased state funding has limited mental health services, and many victims who suffer from depression and other mental health disorders have no access to evaluation or treatment. Even if anti-depressant therapy is

prescribed, the astronomical cost of medication is prohibitive for many. Additionally, there is limited space in surrounding facilities, no local halfway house, and extremely limited local after-care programs. There is a need for resources and qualified personnel to perform assessments, provide treatment, and offer ongoing counseling and aftercare.

Additional funds are needed to add a mental health component for crime victims needing medical treatment for depression to include ongoing follow-up and assistance with the cost of medication.

II. JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION

Juvenile Crime:

Criminal offenses committed by juveniles, a person less than 17 years of age, are increasing rapidly as the population in Hood County continues to increase. According to the US Census Bureau the population in Hood County in 1990 was 28,981 and ten years later in 2000 the population was 41,100, and in 2003, the reported population is 58,000. These numbers indicate that the population in Hood County is continuing to grow rapidly and therefore the county must be able to provide services to combat all of the problems related to an increase in population, to include an increase in juvenile crime.

According to data from the 2000 US Census Bureau the majority of people establishing residency in Hood County are between the ages of 35-44 years old and have children. As the population increases, with it come more and more children of juvenile age who are committing crimes. In the past year there were 390 referrals to Hood County Youth Services, consistent with the population rise, this is a 32% increase in juvenile referrals in the past 10 years. Not only is the number of juvenile offenses growing in Hood County there has also been an increase in the severity of the offenses over the years. The past year 77 felony juvenile crimes were committed, compared to 38 ten years prior. This is a 50% increase in the most severe crimes, which includes aggravated sexual assault, aggravated assault and other serious crimes against persons and property. With data supporting this alarming rate it is vital that dedicated personnel be established and trained to target young offenders and to help prevent recidivism. This dedicated personnel may consist of, but not be limited to, patrol officers, juvenile investigators, probation officers, and other personnel dedicated to the investigation, apprehension, successful prosecution, and intervention of those juveniles who are committing crimes.

In order for dedicated personnel to adequately address the issue of juvenile crime there is also a need for equipment such as computers, lap tops, software, and cameras.

In addition to the personnel and equipment, Law Enforcement Officers should be trained in the recognition of early warning signs, proper techniques for handling juveniles, investigative procedures and intervention techniques.

The implementation of adequate personnel, equipment and additional training will reduce the number of crimes committed by juveniles in Hood County. The reduction of crime in Hood County will result in a higher quality of life in the community, a significant cost savings to tax payers, and will possibly change the direction of many young lives.

Substance Abuse:

According to Hood County Youth Services records, the percentage of substance abuse referrals between September 1, 2002 and September 1, 2003 is 25% of all youth on juvenile probation. Of the students sent to the Behavior Transition Center last year, 57% were state mandated because of drug-related offenses. Drugs are also a contributor to other crimes referred to the department, from property crime to assaults. It is an underlying issue that is difficult to get an exact measure of use in a community. Qualified substance abuse personnel and treatment programs are needed locally. Most of the resources are currently in the Metroplex and surrounding areas, but not in immediate vicinity. The addition of personnel would include trained substance abuse counselors that would counsel with youth. A local treatment program would benefit the community when placement becomes a necessity. Additional resources and qualified personnel would increase the effectiveness in substance abuse treatment and prevention of substance abuse.

After School Programs:

Associated with the rise in county population is the rise in student population and associated rise in number of schools. Programs are under-funded and cannot even begin to meet the demand for services. According to the enrollment figures of Granbury ISD, the largest district in the county, the total number of students enrolled for the 2003-2004 school year is 6,640 students. This reflects a 19% increase in enrollment over the past 10 years. There are not enough after-school/non-school hour community based programs, which operate at no cost or on a sliding scale fee. After-school programs provide the opportunity for programs such as peer mediation training, counseling, tutoring, leadership development and community service opportunities. Increased programs for non-school hours will help in reducing the incidents of juvenile crime by providing an increased level of supervision. Juvenile crime can be impacted positively by having fewer kids walking the neighborhoods unsupervised and through the skills that youth can gain from programs.

Parent Education/Involvement:

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

Continuum of Care:

There is a need to design a continuum of care that addresses early indicators of delinquent conduct such as problems in school, truancy, and cases handled by the

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

III. CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

Introduction:

The 2003 law enforcement community of Hood County is comprised of one Highway Patrol Office, one Municipal Police Department, one Sheriff's Office, two Constable's Offices, one office for the Brazos River Authority, and one office for the Texas Parks & Wildlife Commission. These agencies provide a wide range of services to the public and deal with a variety of issues including but not limited to: child abuse, domestic violence, crimes against persons, property crimes, juvenile crime, substance abuse, mental health/mental retardation, victims of crime, sex offenders, incarceration of adult offenders and response to disasters and acts of terrorism.

Increased Growth in Population:

As stated previously in this plan, the population of Hood County has been increasing rapidly and continues to grow. The population of Hood County increased by a dramatic 41.8% between the years of 1990 and 2000. These statistics clearly indicate the tremendous growing pains Hood County is experiencing at this time.

The increase in population has a direct correlation to an increase in criminal activity, traffic offenses and accidents. Hood County law enforcement agencies need additional resources and qualified personnel to effectively investigate crimes and provide traffic control. The hiring of new officers would increase officer presence and provide prompt response times to calls for service.

Rapid Increase in Non-English Speaking Population:

Coupled with the increased population is the rapid growth of non-English speaking individuals. According to the most recent census report, 6.4% of the current population speaks little or no English. The language barrier limits the ability of the various county agencies attempting to provide effective services for this portion of the population.

The local law enforcement community currently consists of only three officers who are considered fluent in Spanish. Hiring additional bi-lingual officers, as well as training existing personnel in basic bi-lingual communication would allow officers to communicate more effectively by gaining necessary information to assist in law enforcement needs.

Domestic Violence:

The number of family violence cases reported to local law enforcement agencies has only slightly increased over the past two years. However, we are aware that the number of women and children seeking emergency shelter through Mission Granbury has increased by 30% during that same period of time.

As victims of domestic violence become more educated on their rights through the shelter staff, we anticipate an increase in the number of family violence incidents reported to law enforcement officials.

Ideally, Hood County would have an officer designated to respond to and investigate reports of domestic violence. Due to limited funds of the Hood County law enforcement community, that is not possible at this time. Therefore all officers are currently required to receive specialized training in the investigation, pursuit, and arrest of individuals that initiate domestic violence.

Training:

There are currently 50 commissioned law enforcement officers in Hood County according to the Texas Department of Public Safety figures released in 2002. With the overwhelming population increase in Hood County over the past ten years, there has been a proportionate increase in the number and variety of crimes being committed. It is imperative that our officers receive frequent low cost training in order to keep up with the increased demands they face on a daily basis. Training should address officer safety, meet legislative requirements, and provide an increased knowledge base for law enforcement personnel. It stands to reason that officers who have been well trained are more likely to be successful in completing an investigation and apprehending a suspect.

Narcotics / Illegal Drugs:

The use of illegal, narcotic drugs continues to be a significant problem in Hood County. The most recent statistical data from the Hood County Community Supervision & Corrections Department indicates that 64% of the individuals supervised are on probation for a substance abuse related offense, according to STAR Council on Substance Abuse 21 % of the individuals they serve are seeking treatment for addiction to amphetamines, and TCADA reports indicate that 12 people died in Hood County as a result of drug-related activity during the year 2000. These statistics are staggering considering the size of Hood County.

The law enforcement agencies in Hood County are addressing this problem by utilizing a Stop the Offender Program, better known as the S.T.O.P. Narcotics Task Force. This is a multi-jurisdictional task force comprised of officers from four contiguous counties. (Hood, Johnson, Somervell, and Erath). These officers specialize in the investigation of drug related crimes. Investigations can include, but are not limited to, RAVE parties, methamphetamine labs (methamphetamine lab clean-up), street level distribution, reverse stings, and other offenses related to illegal narcotics.

While the S.T.O.P. task force is an effective program, further resources are needed to address the issue of illegal narcotics, prevent their use, and enforce state and federal laws. Hood County law enforcement agencies need access to up-to-date technology,

including but not limited to, the use of body worn microphones, digital cameras, digital recording devices, computers, laptop computers, software, video equipment, surveillance equipment, radios, canines, canine equipment, and telephones. These additional resources would increase the effectiveness of a narcotics investigation and help insure a successful prosecution.

By reducing the number of individuals using illegal narcotic drugs, a community increases its standard of living and decreases the cost to society as a whole by reducing the number of people hospitalized or treated for addiction and by decreasing the number of property and/or violent crimes associated with drug use and the selling/manufacturing of drugs.

Interoperability / Communications:

Radio communications between various law enforcement agencies, and other emergency service providers, are significantly hampered due to the inoperability of the various communication systems utilized throughout the community. In the event of a major crisis (terrorism, natural disaster, or other emergency) the ability to have a coordinated multi-agency response would be difficult.

Communications for all emergency services in Hood County are centralized at the Hood County Sheriff's Department, but each individual agency has separate frequencies that are not interoperable. Emergency response agencies in Hood County need additional resources and equipment to effectively communicate between various radio systems and agencies. The equipment needed may include, but is not limited to, multiple command vehicles strategically placed throughout the community, enhancements to existing radio systems, and enhancements to the equipment used by individual agencies within Hood County. Additionally, public safety officials would need training in the use of any new equipment.

Increased radio operability throughout the county would provide for a safer, more timely, and coordinated response to emergency situations throughout the Hood County area. This enhanced response would save money, time and more importantly, the lives of emergency workers, public officials, and citizens.

Domestic Preparedness - Homeland Security:

Emergency service providers, including the various law enforcement agencies of Hood County, are tasked with providing a new and increased level of security throughout the community so as to prevent and/or deter any act of terrorism. The identification of potential targets allows law enforcement officials to "target harden" these sites, thus deterring acts of terrorism in and around Hood County. New equipment, training, and multi-jurisdictional cooperation are needed in order to address the specialized needs of Hood County's Homeland Security efforts.

Technology:

According to the 2001 and 2002 Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) periods, the following crimes have increased county wide: robbery, burglary, larceny, and auto theft. The availability of advanced technology for law enforcement personnel would assist officers

in the detection of crime, immediate identification of offenders, and crime prevention thus allowing officers to be more productive with their time and skills.

Advances in technology are emerging daily, while the technology and computers used by law enforcement are out-dated and under-powered. Local law enforcement agencies need updated and enhanced computer capabilities that include, but are not limited to desk top computers, lap top computers, Mobile Data Computers, servers, and updated software (investigative and word processing).

At the present time, none of Hood County's law enforcement agencies have access to Mobile Data Computers. The use of computers in patrol cars would assist law enforcement with the retrieval of important data that could save their life, or the life of a victim. Mobile Data Computers would also allow officers to take and complete reports in the field. This capability would lessen the time an officer is out on a particular call and increase the amount of time he or she has to prevent crime and interact with the community they serve.

Time and effort can also be saved with software and databases that are shared throughout the county. A centralized database, and the sharing of criminal intelligence regionally, would allow officers to research criminal activity throughout the county, instead of just their jurisdiction. Increased knowledge and data can provide the missing link to unsolved crimes and result in the arrest of suspects who commit crimes in multiple cities. This technology is applicable to both adult and juvenile data/records

Juvenile Crime:

As previously indicated, criminal offenses committed by juveniles are increasing rapidly as the population in Hood County increases. The majority of people establishing residency in Hood County are 35-44 years old and have children. As more children move into Hood County, the number of crimes they commit increases as well.

Juvenile crime in Hood County has become increasingly more severe. Juvenile crime used to be simple offenses such as criminal mischief and simple theft. Now juvenile crime includes robbery, aggravated assault, sexual assault, distribution, manufacturing and possession of narcotics, and many other serious offenses.

Due to the significant drug and alcohol problems encountered in the adult population of Hood County, the local law enforcement community recognizes the need for early intervention to prevent juvenile participation in activities related to substance abuse

Again, it must be emphasized that training of all law enforcement officers in Hood County in the recognition of early warning signs, proper techniques for handling juveniles, investigative procedures and intervention techniques, along with other training related to juvenile crime will assist law enforcement in reducing the number of crimes committed by young individuals.

The addition and implementation of personnel training would help reduce the number of crimes committed by juveniles in Hood County. The reduction of crimes would result in a higher quality of life for the community, a significant cost savings to tax payers, more productive young members of society, and would possibly save lives.

Driving While Intoxicated:

Drinking and driving has become a serious problem in Hood County. Over the past five years, the number of DWI arrests made by local law enforcement officers has nearly doubled. The problem has been identified and each Law Enforcement Agency is taking proactive measures to address the issue.

Every patrol car in Hood County has been equipped with a mounted video camera to record a suspected DWI offender while he or she is driving a vehicle, as well as recording their performance during field sobriety tests. These video tapes are crucial to the successful prosecution of DWI cases. It is important to note that most of the video equipment in the Granbury Police Department vehicles is currently five years old and will soon need major repairs or replacement.

Another preventative measure is the required use of an Ignition Interlock Device on the car of any offender who is on probation for a felony DWI offense. This device requires a driver to give a breath sample before he or she is able to start their vehicle. If alcohol is detected on their breath, the device creates a "lock down" that prevents the car from being started.

Probation Absconders:

In the past there has been a backlog of probation absconders with active warrants for their arrest. These offenders are a threat to public safety as a result of the offenses they have committed and/or might commit if not apprehended and brought back under the supervision of the court.

This backlog of warrants is due, in part, to staffing patterns within local law enforcement agencies. Officers have been unable to provide the individualized attention necessary to locate probation fugitives, serve warrants, and make the related arrest.

Sex Offenders Residing in the Community:

There are currently thirty-five probated sex offenders living in Hood County. These individuals must be closely monitored in order to decrease the risk they pose to members of the community.

Some of the specialized conditions of probation may include: samples of the offender's DNA for the Texas Department of Public Safety's computerized DNA database; attendance of specialized sex offender treatment with a specially licensed mental health professional; registration as a sex offender; inclusion on the DPS internet website list of sex offenders; publication of the offender's name, address and offense in the local newspaper; and prohibiting offenders from entering established child safety zones (areas where children commonly gather or congregate).

**Hood County Criminal Justice Community Plan
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