

# Tarrant County Juvenile Services

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A Five Year Strategic Plan for 2013-2018

**Randy Turner, Chief Juvenile Probation Officer**

**Tarrant County Juvenile Services**  
**Strategic Plan 2013-2018: “Moving Forward”**

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To All Tarrant County Juvenile Justice System Stakeholders:

After significant conversation and dialogue over the past several months, I am pleased to present the Tarrant County Juvenile Services' Strategic Plan for 2013-2018. This work reflects a major milestone for our Department after several years of significant change within the juvenile justice system in Texas, and addresses how our Department will continue to address the needs of our Department and community.

This plan was developed through a collaborative effort of staff throughout our organization. Even though the work was coordinated by the Department's leadership team, it involved significant input from supervisory and line staff in order to obtain appropriate perspective and insight into the most important aspects of our collective work.

Our plan addresses opportunities to address all phases of the juvenile justice system, from delinquency prevention to aftercare. It involves the effective use of program evaluation and research to ensure that we are utilizing the most appropriate and effective services possible to address the needs of our community. And, it clearly reflects that we must continue to focus energy to establish and maintain effective partnerships with all stakeholders involved in the juvenile justice system to effectively ensure community safety and address the needs of the youth and families we serve.

As the Director of Tarrant County Juvenile Services, I am continually reminded of the quality of staff that I have the privilege to lead and work with to meet our Department's mission and vision. Through the process of developing this strategic plan, I personally have again been able to observe and participate with a group of professionals who regularly strive to serve the community in the best manner possible. As we work together to realize our Department's vision, "A Safe and Healthy Quality of Life for our Communities," I look forward to working with our staff and community stakeholders to address the needs of the Tarrant County community for years to come.

Thanks to ALL of You!

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Randy Turner".

Randy Turner  
Director/Chief Juvenile Probation Officer

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Staff at all levels of the organization have contributed to the development of the Strategic Plan. It would be difficult to clearly identify all staff that provided input into the various work groups and regular feedback as the plan evolved into the final version. We must acknowledge the leadership that was provided by both senior managers and supervisory personnel to develop the plan as we continue together on our journey toward the fulfillment of our Department's Mission, Vision, and Values.

### Senior Managers:

Randy Turner, Director

Bennie Medlin, Assistant Director, Institutional and Educational Services

Lyn Willis, Assistant Director, Probation Services (retired)

Deborah Butler, Deputy Assistant Director, Specialized Probation Services

Rhonda Delcambre, Deputy Assistant Director, Pre-Supervision Services

Sheryl Eagleton, Deputy Assistant Director, Quality Development

Ron Lewis, Deputy Assistant Director, Institutional Services

Charles Vermersch, Deputy Assistant Director, Traditional Probation Services (retired)

Marihelen Wieberg, Deputy Assistant Director, Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program

### Supervisory Team (in addition to the senior managers listed above):

|                           |                         |                            |                       |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Shelley Alexander*</b> | Greg Frick              | Deanna Madrid              | Jeff Rogers           |
| Denise Anderson           | Richard Gonzales        | <b>Julie Martin, PhD*</b>  | Nancy Sandacz         |
| David Ansley              | <b>Hope Harris*</b>     | Todd Mateja                | Debbie Spoons         |
| Greg Breault              | <b>Ken Harris*</b>      | <b>Bill Menchaca, PhD*</b> | <b>Greg Sumpter*</b>  |
| <b>Vickie Bowers*</b>     | Laurie Hooper           | <b>Frank Minikon*</b>      | <b>David VanHook*</b> |
| <b>Tommy Darthard*</b>    | Lachandras Jackson      | <b>Mike McKelvain*</b>     | Ed Williams           |
| <b>Jim Davidson*</b>      | Mary Kelleher           | Luann Pelletier            | <b>Kelly Willis*</b>  |
| <b>Setrick Dickens*</b>   | Ernie Lopez             | Jacinto Ramos              | Tom Zaback            |
| Johnny Dotson             | <b>Bernice Mack*</b>    | <b>Eric Remington*</b>     | Donna Zavala          |
| Sarita Esqueda            | <b>Ashley Marineau*</b> | <b>Jesus Reyes*</b>        | Gerald Ray (retired)  |
| Jennifer Farnum, PhD      |                         |                            |                       |

**\*Those Supervisors shown in bold were Issue Managers and coordinated the work of the "issue groups" to assist in the development of the strategic plan.**

Stakeholders:

We also believe it is important to acknowledge and recognize that we cannot forget the impact that the many stakeholders throughout our own community and the State have on our ability to successfully implement the strategic plan. These partners are critical in our planning and execution of the plan, and will be critical to our success. We acknowledge this factor very specifically in our Values: “We partner with families, communities, and organizations to seek solutions to juvenile crime.” The ability to effectively serve our community and address the needs of youth and families from prevention, to intervention and treatment, can only come through our ability to collaborate with our community.

The following is a list of who we believe are our stakeholders in the work of providing effective juvenile justice interventions and services:

- The 323<sup>rd</sup> Juvenile Court, consisting of Family Court Judge Jean Boyd and Associate Judges Tim Menikos, Ellen Smith, and Kim Brown, as well as their staff
- The Tarrant County Juvenile Board
- The Tarrant County Commissioners Court
- The Tarrant County District Attorney Office
- Youth and their parents and families
- Other County agencies and City Governments within Tarrant County
- School districts located in Tarrant County
- Law Enforcement Agencies
- Victims, victims’ families, and potential victims
- Community-Based Service Providers, both public and private
- Mental Health service providers and Healthcare systems
- Residential facilities serving youth populations
- Children and Youth Advocates
- Communities and neighborhoods
- Universities and Colleges
- Texas Juvenile Justice Department, and other State agencies
- Texas Legislature

It is important that we understand that all of these individuals, agencies, and members of the larger Tarrant County and State of Texas community have a role in the work we accomplish, and are important partners and collaborators as we implement the strategic plan. Our success will be enhanced as we understand and seek input from these various stakeholders, and diligently work to understand the perspective that each may have as we implement the various components of the plan. We are committed to inclusion of these various stakeholders as we proceed with implementation and management of the strategic plan over the next five years.

**Tarrant County Juvenile Services**  
**Strategic Plan: *Moving Forward***  
**2013-2018**

**THE STARTING POINT**

In January 2011, the Department’s leadership (internally referred to as the Senior Leadership Team, or “SLT”) embarked on a significant journey to clearly identify the most critical areas of focus for our Department. In order to do so, the first challenge was to familiarize ourselves with the most current and relevant issues facing the juvenile justice system nationally, state-wide, and locally. We agreed to identify the most appropriate dynamics of effective service delivery to delinquent youth and their families. As a group, we reviewed numerous data reports and program evaluations on our Department; read numerous studies on evidence-based practices and new initiatives that have promising results for juvenile offenders; and read various reports on the state of juvenile justice and other systems that directly impact the youth and families we serve. Appendix A contains a glossary of all the documents included in this review.

In addition to reviewing various aspects of effective service delivery for a changing juvenile offender population, the SLT also took an internal look at the culture within our department based on a staff survey that was completed in the fall of 2010. The survey was based on the Federal Human Capital Survey that serves as validated measures of human capital in public sector organizations. This quantitative survey measures employees’ perceptions of whether and to what extent conditions that characterize successful organizations are present in their agency, including four Human Capital Management Indices: (a) Leadership and Knowledge Management, (b) Talent Management, (c) Results-Oriented Performance Culture, and (d) Job Satisfaction. The survey results provided senior managers critical information to answer the question: What can we do to make our agency work better? We concluded that if we accept the comments and the survey results as true indicators of the department’s culture, then we must develop strategies to build bridges to organizational success within the agency.

Two critical aspects for strategic planning became the focus for our collaborative work, specifically (1) improving programs and services for youth and families and (2) improving the culture within our Department.

Over the next nine months, the SLT collectively reviewed data, formulated initial perspectives on both of these important subjects, and broadened the conversation by including all Supervisors through a supervisory retreat in June 2011. Over the next few months, this same group sorted through the wealth of data to formulate key areas under the two broad themes of “Organizational Climate” and “Improving Programs and Operations.” As this process unfolded, “Issue Group Managers” were identified to

coordinate and lead teams of staff from all levels of the organization in a review of the key concepts identified during our previous work. As this work began to solidify, key topics emerged for the focused work of the Issue Group Managers:

**Theme: Organizational Climate**

**Topics: Leadership**

**Training and Development**

**Communication**

**Employee Recognition**

**Theme: Improving Programs and Operations**

**Topics: Resource Development**

**Program Evaluation**

**Case Management**

**Partnerships with Schools**

The eight Issue Groups sorted through data related to the eight topic areas, considered potential goals that would support progress in achieving positive outcomes in support of each area, and began to develop concepts and practical application of resources that could be implemented in the short-term. Issue Group Managers submitted valuable concepts for programmatic and operational enhancements for improvements to the Department’s organizational culture. See Appendix B for the details of this work.

It was at this point that the SLT and the Supervisory team realized that it must take significant time to synthesize this wealth of data that encompassed both their own work as well as the work of the Issue Groups, and work to clearly define the strategic goals for the Department. The SLT also realized and understood that along with this data, it needed to consider the trends and conditions that impact our work, and the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) that must be considered when developing the strategic plan.

## NAVIGATING THROUGH THE TRENDS AND CONDITIONS

It is often said that the only constant we can count on is *change*. When considering the juvenile justice system nationally, state-wide, and locally, that has certainly been the case over the past several years.

Nationally, referrals for criminal activity and delinquent conduct have consistently decreased over the past 5-6 years. This particular trend has been described and debated as somewhat surprising. Typically, when the economic stability of the country is on the decline, crime and delinquency rates tend to increase as well. Questions are abundant as to why the country is not seeing a rise in crime and delinquency given the economic stress that has been a part of our culture over the past several years.

In the summer of 2011, in the on-line version of the City Journal ([www.city-journal.org](http://www.city-journal.org)), James Q. Wilson (former professor at Harvard and UCLA, and a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom) writes in an article entitled “Crime and the Great Recession”: “Jobs have fled, lawbreaking hasn’t risen—and

criminologists are scratching their heads.” Wilson goes on to identify several factors that could be having an impact on the lowering crime rates, including:

*“Many more people are in prison than in the past...when prisoners are kept off the street, they can attack only one another, not you or your family...Potential victims may have become better at protecting themselves by equipping their homes with burglar alarms, installing extra locks on their cars, and moving into safer buildings or even safer neighborhoods...Policing has become more disciplined over the last two decades; these days, it tends to be driven by the desire to reduce crime, rather than simply to maximize arrests, and that shift has reduced crime rates. One of the most important innovations is what has been called hot-spot policing...Put active police resources in those areas instead of telling officers to drive around waiting for 911 calls, and you can bring down crime...Some cities now use a computer-based system for mapping traffic accidents and crime rates...There may also be a medical reason for the crime decline. For decades, doctors have known that children with lots of lead in their blood are much more likely to be aggressive, violent, and delinquent. In 1974, the Environmental Protection Agency required oil companies to stop putting lead in gasoline. At the same time, lead in paint was banned for any new home. Tests have shown that the amount of lead in Americans’ blood fell by four-fifths between 1975 and 1991...Yet one more shift that has probably helped bring down crime is the decrease in the heavy cocaine use in many states. Between 1992 and 2009, the number of (hospital) admissions for cocaine or crack use fell by nearly two-thirds...Blacks still constitute the core of America’s crime problem...But the African-American crime rate, too, has been falling, probably because of the same noneconomic factors behind falling crime in general: imprisonment, policing, environmental changes, and less cocaine abuse...At the deepest level, many of these shifts, taken together, suggest that crime in the United States is falling—even through the greatest economic downturn since the Great Depression—because of a big improvement in the **culture** (emphasis added).”*

Two years later as crime and delinquency rates continued to fall, through the Urban Institute’s “MetroTrends Blog,” author John Roman writes about “America’s crime decline: It’s NOT about the (national) economy” (September 23, 2013):

*“Violent crime rates are down for the 7th year in a row, and down for the 18th year out of the last 20. Property crime rates are down for the 12th year in a row, and 19th year out of the last 20. Since 1991, violent crime rates have fallen by half, while property crime is down about 45 percent....Criminologists tend to say that tough economic times make more people willing to commit crimes. Bad economics lead to more property crimes and robberies as criminals steal coveted items they cannot afford. The economic anxiety of bad times leads to more domestic violence and greater consumption of mind-altering substances, leading to more violence in general. Economists tend to argue the opposite, that better economic times increase crime. More people are out and about flashing their shiny new smartphones and tablets, more new cars*



*sit unattended in parking lots, and there are more big-screen TVs in homes to steal. Better economic times also means more demand for drugs and alcohol, and the attendant violence that often accompanies their consumption....The bottom line: Crime is episodic and there is not singular effect of the economy on crime. In order to understand and prevent crime, it is therefore necessary to understand what type of period we are in. **It's also necessary to understand what forces are at work locally** (emphasis added), rather than focus on the national picture."*

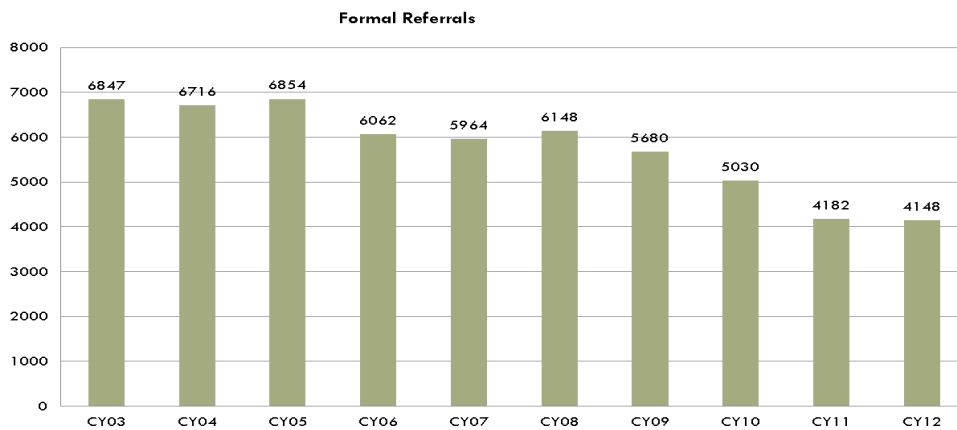
With referrals decreasing, whatever the cause, there is an opportunity to take a closer look at what juvenile justice professionals can continue to do to address the likely causes of the decline. In order to more effectively respond to crime and delinquency when it does occur, our review of national research has identified several factors, resources, and strategies that have shown positive outcomes for offenders. These include:

- ✓ the use of an assessment tool to clearly define the risk and criminogenic needs of both adult and juvenile offenders;
- ✓ the use of Motivational Interviewing as an intervention process;
- ✓ the use of community-, family-, and evidence-based intervention services;
- ✓ the need to address disparity and disproportionate minority contact within both the adult and juvenile systems;
- ✓ the need to change the disciplinary practices within public education systems that tend to undermine the success of youth in school, especially for minority youth; and,
- ✓ the use of incarceration for only the most serious offenders who truly present a serious threat to community safety.

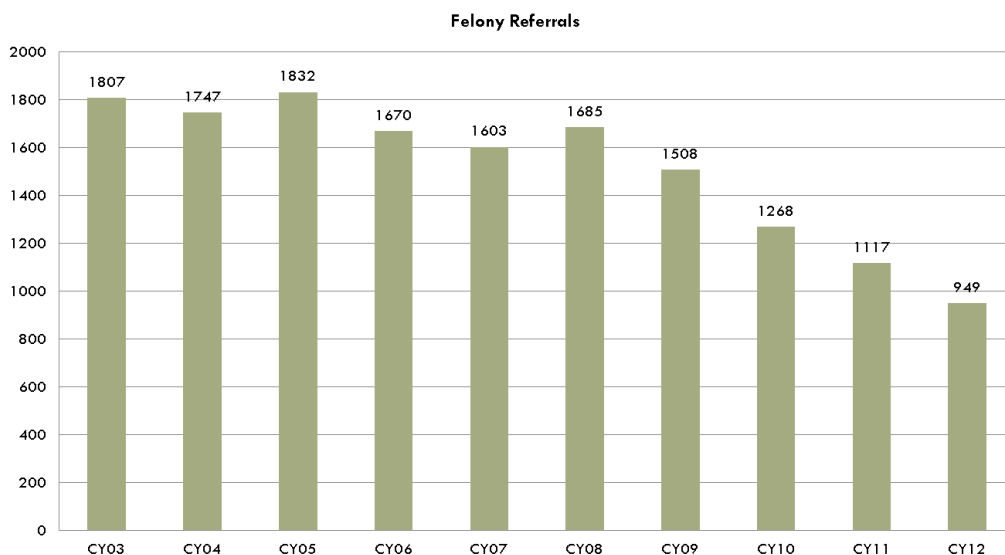
At the State level, similar to what has been experienced at the national level, delinquency referrals have decreased across most jurisdictions. This has directly resulted in fewer youth coming in contact with local juvenile probation departments across the State, and has at least in part reduced the number of youth being placed in the State's custody. During this same time as declining referrals, and particularly since 2007 when allegations of abuse surfaced in State-operated secure facilities, more and more emphasis has been placed on serving youth at the local county level where it is believed and expected that local juvenile probation departments can best meet the needs of the youth and families within the local community. The population in the State-operated secure facilities has been drastically reduced from 5,000 youth in 2007 to 1,200 youth today. This initiative has thus far resulted in the closure of nine secure facilities across the State, and has resulted in additional funding being provided to local probation departments to support community-based services; to allow youth to be placed in community residential care rather than state-operated, secure incarceration; and, to provide opportunities for prevention services for youth prior to referral for a delinquent offense. This change in emphasis has provided additional financial resources to the local juvenile probation departments, but it has also created additional challenges. Through the reform efforts, misdemeanor youth can no longer be committed to the State's custody, increasing the number of youth being served through local resources.

As more youth are being served locally, capacity for effective services is stretched. This will require further innovative and creative development of both State and local resources, and further require collaborative work within community settings. In addition, if State funding is reduced due to further economic stress, the local resources will be stretched and challenged, potentially limiting available resources.

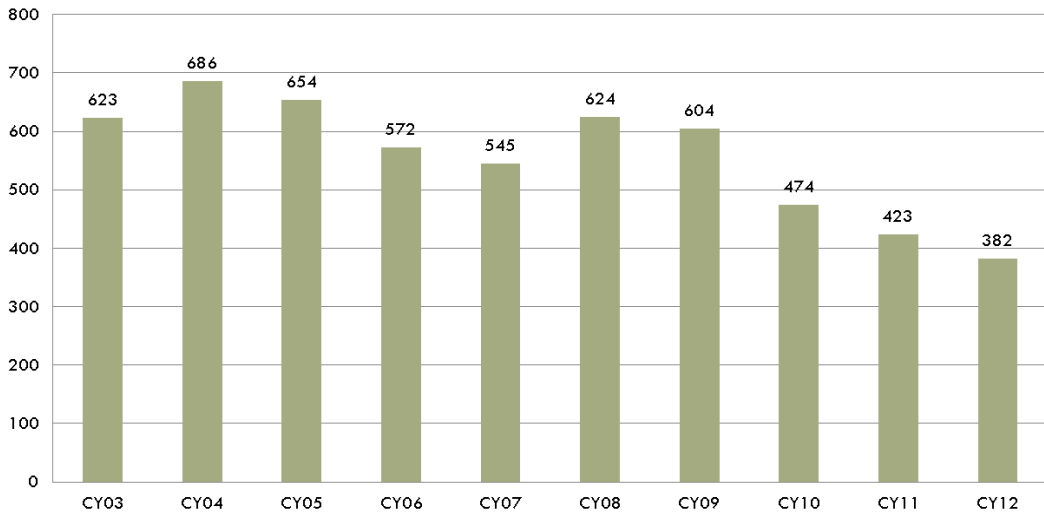
Tarrant County Juvenile Services (TCJS) has also seen a significant reduction in referrals over the past ten years.



Formal referrals to TCJS include ALL referrals for both delinquent conduct and status offenses. This trend is especially significant when considering the reduction in **felony** and **violent felony** referrals as shown in the following graphs.

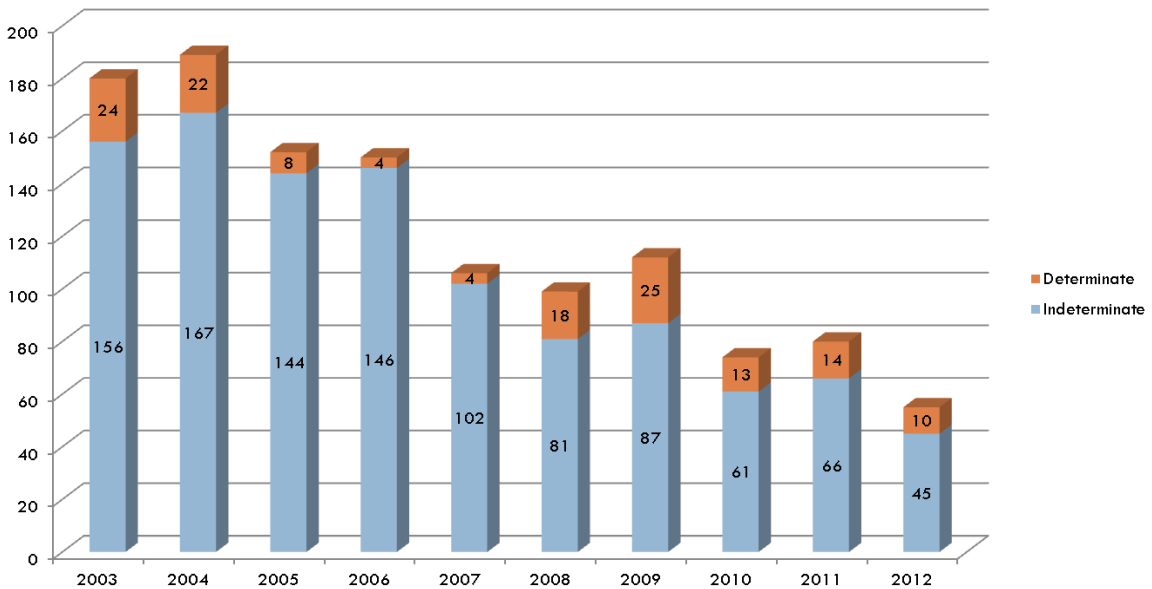


### Violent Felony Referrals



As noted above, the population in the State-operated secure facilities has declined significantly over the past six years. With the infusion of State funding, local departments have been able to expand and provide services to youth and families and impact the number of youth committed to the State's custody. In Tarrant County, the Juvenile Courts have significantly reduced commitments.

### TJJD Commitments by Commitment Type: 2003 to 2012



For the past 30 years, TCJS has been involved in implementing innovative practices that have changed the juvenile system locally, and has had an impact on state-wide initiatives to improve the juvenile system. By initiating community- and family-based services, TCJS set a path of community-based interventions rather than building secure facilities to house youth. Research has shown that such an approach has more positive outcomes for youth and families. And, in order to provide appropriate educational services for youth on probation, TCJS historically initiated a collaborative effort with a local school district to provide academic services for these youth. Ultimately, this resulted in the creation of the now legislated requirements for Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs in the largest county jurisdictions across the State. More recently, in line with national research, TCJS has been one of the first juvenile probation departments in Texas to implement the use of a nationally recognized, research-based assessment tool to better identify the criminogenic risk and needs of the juvenile offender. In addition, after research has shown positive results through the use of Motivational Interviewing (MI) with both adult and juvenile offenders, TCJS has embraced the use of this intervention process to support all of its interactions with youth and families we serve.

As we consider the impact of these trends and conditions at all levels of the juvenile justice system, it is important if not critical for local juvenile probation departments to regularly assess their service delivery systems, conduct research on programs that are implemented, and clearly define how they can continue to be effective within this changing culture.

#### **FOLLOWING THE SIGNS: STRENGTHS-WEAKNESSES-OPPORTUNITIES-THREATS (SWOT)**

As a major component of the strategic planning process, the SLT had to include work to clearly identify and define our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. By identifying strengths, the leadership team could reflect on what we are doing well and determine how we can build on that foundation. By honestly considering our weaknesses, we could more clearly understand what improvements we need to make as a team and what steps are needed to improve services that are needed within the community, and how we can more effectively lead the organization. After identifying the weaknesses, we could then correlate the opportunities we have to address those needs, as well as potentially identifying new opportunities based on our review of national, state, and local trends. Lastly, in order to adequately plan for the future, we had to assess the potential threats that could impact our ability to strengthen our departmental culture and service delivery systems, effectively address our weaknesses, take advantage of the opportunities, and ultimately reach our goals.

#### **Strengths:**

TCJS has a history of utilizing community, family, and evidence-based principles and practices. The department has implemented an effective assessment process, has initiated the use of Motivational Interviewing, and has placed an emphasis on program research and outcome measurements.

Fortunately, we benefit from visionary and collaborative leadership and innovative practices within the service delivery agencies, educational institutions and governmental systems of the County. There is a sense of cooperation between the Juvenile Board that provides the governance for the Department, and the County Commissioners Court that provides strong funding support. The Commissioners Court supports an increase in the effective use of technology that supports our work, including funding for a new case management system.

County-wide service agencies share a commitment to collaboration, as evidenced by the cooperative effort of the Mental Health Connection that has resulted in millions of grant funds being brought to our communities. We have developed strong supports from area academic institutions that provide opportunities to recruit interns and new personnel, support for research activities, and on-going training and formal education for personnel. Local law enforcement agencies are engaged in community-policing models.

There is a growing commitment to increased funding and support systems for prevention services from the State legislature that can potentially reduce referrals to the juvenile justice system. And, due to our commitment to minimize the use of secure detention, and ensuring that State standards are not only met but exceeded, we are well-positioned to respond to issues related to concerns with the condition of confinement for youthful offenders.

The Department also benefits from the professional level and tenure of our personnel. All professional level positions require a minimum of a bachelor's degree, and by State standards, require eighty hours of training every two years. Turnover rates in FY 2012 for Juvenile Probation and Juvenile Supervision Officers is under 8%; for all front-line Supervisors the rate is under 4%. This provides significant stability to our department as a whole, and can provide significant leadership for the future.

**Weaknesses:**

Identified weaknesses encompass several variables and issues that impact our overall effectiveness.

For the populations we serve, there is a sense of declining family well-being. This is a reality for many of the families we serve from an economical perspective, as well as their general health. We see a population that continues to be involved in significant substance abuse, whose general health and fitness is lacking, and mental health needs are growing. We need to be able to be more responsive to the demographic trends of our communities, including undocumented youth/families. Though strides have been made in developing cultural and linguistic competencies through training of our staff, we must continue to grow in our understanding of diversity and disproportionality in our systems. There must be a commitment to family engagement practices, case planning and management must be family centered and must be a core tenet of service delivery from the point of intake, throughout probation, and if needed, during placement and aftercare.

There is a lack of effective and responsive services at all points of the continuum. More prevention services are needed; educational stabilization is needed for youth at-risk of dropping out of school; equitable access must be available for youth/families regardless of where they live in the county; enhanced services must be available for the highest risk/need youth and families to address chronic and severe needs; and there is a lack of effective residential services for respite and long-term care within our region.

Case management practices need to be better defined and implemented consistently to work more effectively with youth and families. In order to have the necessary personnel and resources, an applicable criterion for manageable caseload size must be considered. A traditional probation service system that involves surveillance and ensuring compliance to a set of conditions is still considered adequate by some. An increase in the utilization of case management principles and tools, building resilience in challenged families, assisting youth and families to address their own needs, and supporting family voice and choice are all needed.

Finally, the overall perception of leadership within the department must be enhanced. Staff want to see a strong, unified leadership team, where their decision-making responsibilities are supported and there is a clear expectation of accountability. Staff want to have a presence and voice in the formulation of policy and business practices that affect them. They desire to see objectivity and fairness in the work environment, including promotional opportunities, disciplinary actions, training opportunities, etc. There needs to be a clear understanding and utilization of adaptive leadership principles that engages staff at all levels of the organization.

**Opportunities:**

TCJS can develop an effective methodology for case management to best meet the needs our clients. This should include several different issues that will have an impact on all areas of service for the department:

- Determining an appropriate caseload size for the various units within the department;
- Improving partnerships with the child welfare system, and particularly, addressing the needs of crossover youth;
- Improving responsiveness to the particular needs of each youth and family;
- Increasing the cultural and linguistic competency of staff, and addressing disproportionate minority contact through a community-wide effort;
- Enhancing our application of restorative justice principles;
- Implementing policy and practices that support family engagement;
- Developing strategies and interventions to divert youth from further penetration into the system whenever possible; and
- Improving educational outcomes and school achievement.

In conjunction with improved case management, the department should work to increase the effectiveness and responsiveness of resources for youth and families at all points of the continuum. This should include enhancement of prevention measures as much as possible and feasible. This should include a placement continuum that addresses everything from short-term respite care to post-placement aftercare.

There should be a commitment to enhance the academic success of youth under the supervision of the Court and the Department. This should begin with a comprehensive review of how the department can better partner with the local school districts, evaluating the department's response to truancy with youth under supervision, and through better utilization of resources at the Juvenile Justice Alternative Justice Program. The JJAEP already has staff in place, a credit recovery program, GED preparation activities, and counseling resources to address the needs of students who are struggling with their educational needs. This could provide a resource to address this fundamental need and enhance the potential for success.

Youth continue to be involved in the use and abuse of substances, and often times, treatment is not readily available in all sections of the County under current contract agreements. There should be an extensive review of effective resources throughout the County to ensure these services are available to all youth and families in close proximity to their home.

Mental health treatment is a growing need. Even though as a juvenile justice agency we do not want to become the primary treatment provider of mental health services, through effective case management and partnerships with the local Mental Health Authority and other community-based agencies, the department should expand mental health services. It is anticipated that this is one of the fastest growing populations to be served within the juvenile system, and expanded resources must be identified to meet this need.

With a population of 50-60 youth detained on a daily basis, there is opportunity to provide effective services within this environment even though youth on average are only in the facility 10-11 days. There are youth who must remain longer due to the nature of the delinquent conduct and pending Court action, pending placement in long-term care, mental health needs that cannot be met in any other setting, and/or other resources are not readily available. At present, staffing consists primarily of direct supervision officers and support personnel. There should be an opportunity to enhance programming with appropriate human resources to provide more effective recreation and leisure time activities, counseling services, life skills training, etc. In addition, nursing coverage is not provided throughout the week, and with the growing population of youth with mental health needs and related medication management concerns, this oversight is critical.

The department should continue with its commitment to enhancing and expanding the use of evidence-based methodologies and best practices as relevant research continues to evolve and identify "what

works” with juvenile offenders. It will be important to adapt, implement, and manage a consistent client risk and needs assessment, and conduct appropriate research on in-house and contracted programs and services. This should be enhanced by furthering relationships with local universities that have an interest in social research.

Even though the Department has a history of collaborative relationships with many community agencies and stakeholders, we should continually work to enhance the working relationships between the Court-related stakeholders (i.e. Judges, Prosecutors, Defense Attorneys, etc) to ensure an appropriate balance of community safety and appropriate levels of intervention are maintained. As the Department learns more through research on what works with various offenders, this collaborative effort should support the various needs and objectives of each. As individuals within each of these critical components of the juvenile system change, it will be important to educate and align activities of these key juvenile justice stakeholders.

While developing an understanding of our department’s culture, a focus needs to be place on creating alignment and consensus around the culture of leadership within the department, incorporating an effective decision-making model that is understood by senior leadership and supervisors so that each level within the organization knows and understands their decision making authority. There should be an environment of accountability at all levels of the organization to the accepted leadership model and department standards. Business processes and practices, as well as formal policy and procedure, should foster visibility and transparency, and should promote inclusion among staff at all levels and within all units. Methods of communication that are current, unified, consistent, and timely should be utilized to enhance a strong culture. The department should consider how it can utilize current and new technologies to enhance communication internally as well as externally.

As our most valuable resource, employee development and recognition should be an important component in the development of any strategic planning. The investment in our human capital, especially when the department has a solid history of stability at all levels of the organization, cannot be overlooked when planning for the future. Staff need to be provided with the best training and tools possible to provide effective services. The evaluation process should be enhanced to address core competencies specifically related to our work. And, we should establish and maintain a process to recognize employees for their contribution to the department and the community we serve.

**Threats:**

Even though the State legislature has directed funding to the local juvenile probation departments over the past few years, with the current economic conditions of the country, potential loss of funding is always a relevant concern. The department has already experienced a loss in Federal Title IV-E (90% reduction) and grant revenues.



There is a culture at both the legislative and congressional levels that reflects unwillingness to compromise on key issues that impact human services. In addition, the Texas legislature is considering a variety of options that could directly impact our ability to maintain current services, such as minimizing if not abolishing state-operated secure facilities for juvenile offenders, and increasing the age youth remain in the juvenile justice system to the 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. The juvenile justice system in Texas has undergone major changes since 2007, and has not been given the time to adjust to changes before additional changes are made. This can create instability for the State agency that the local juvenile probation departments depend on for financial support, staff training, legal guidance, and setting standards for operations and monitoring.

Student failure in school has multiple impacts on the juvenile system. The more a youth fails in and/or dropouts of school, the higher likelihood he/she will enter the juvenile justice system. As documented in reports such as the “School to Prison Pipeline” and “Breaking Schools Rules” (see Appendix A) youth who become disenfranchised from the academic setting are much more likely to eventually be involved in the juvenile and criminal justice systems. The local school districts must be more progressive in addressing the needs of students and work to keep them in school rather than feeding the pipeline. In addition, the fewer youth who have a solid education, the weaker our workforce and long-term economy will become.

The on-going threats to family stability can have a direct impact on the juvenile justice system. Situations such as limited access to appropriate health care, increase in unemployment, increase in the number of families living in poverty, challenges to funding for higher education, declining health and fitness, and lack of stability in the home due to neglect, abuse, and even violence are all a threat to the ability of the juvenile system to meet the demands of the population we serve.

## A COMMITMENT TO OUR MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES:

Tarrant County Juvenile Services maintains its commitment to work to address the needs of the Tarrant County community. As the strategic plan is implemented, it must support and be aligned with the Department's Mission, Vision, and Values. By doing so, a healthy work-place environment and effective programs and services will be maintained.

### **Our Mission:**

To operate a justice organization that supports victim rights and community safety while fostering productive, responsible behavior for youth and families.

### **Our Vision:**

A safe and healthy quality of life for our communities.

### **Our Core Values:**

#### **APPLICATION OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE:**

We provide fair and responsive treatment for victims of juvenile crime in a manner that affirms victims experience while addressing offender rehabilitation;

#### **SERVICE TO THE COURT:**

We serve the Court and execute its orders in a partnership involving the youth, family, probation officer, victim, and community;

#### **PARTNERSHIPS:**

We partner with families, communities, and organizations to seek solutions to juvenile crime;

#### **INDIVIDUAL STRENGTH-FOCUSED APPROACH:**

We implement probation strategies which support a youth's successful functioning in the community as well as personal accountability for injury caused; assist youth to recognize their value and identify personal strengths through interventions which build assets and increase capabilities; and help families support their children in overcoming barriers to growth and responsible behavior;

#### **RESPECT:**

We act with sensitivity to racial, ethnic, cultural, familial, and offense diversity; provide services in a professional and ethical manner; and demonstrate appreciation and respect for all employees, recognizing that our mission is more important than role distinctions;

#### **EXCELLENCE:**

We strive for excellence in service delivery by implementing evidence-based practices that are creative, flexible, innovative, technologically refined, and measured.

## MAPPING THE JOURNEY: DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN

After completing the review of relevant materials, involving the various work groups to provide input into the process, reviewing current trends and conditions, completing the SWOT analysis, and reinforcing the commitment to our mission, vision, and values, the SLT had more clearly defined a collective perspective of the current state of affairs that directly impact how we can strategically move our Department forward. We focused attention to developing the major “Platforms” for the strategic plan and the “Goals” associated with each Platform. This broad-based work encompassed all of the work products that had been developed (see Appendix B), as well as including areas of focus that were not specifically addressed by the Issue Groups yet the SLT identified as critical components of our Department’s strategic work. This specifically involved inclusion of our commitment to victim services, prevention services, and the development of cultural and linguistic competency.

Understanding that the “journey” we are on to work together to meet the goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan, the SLT understands and acknowledges that to get to the desired outcomes, we will have to go through a continuous process of strategic planning as trends and conditions may change, especially during each State legislative session every two years. This work will provide a strong foundation to build upon, and we must be disciplined to keep our focus on the process of this journey. In light of this understanding, the SLT is making several commitments that we believe will support the process for the entire Department as we strive to obtain the desired outcomes throughout implementation of the Strategic Plan.

Staff at all levels of the organization have been involved in significant training on the concepts and the application of a common language and tools to address “adaptive challenges” when dealing with change. It is critical we move forward collectively with the implementation of the plan that we model and utilize behaviors that illustrate effective technical and adaptive leadership principles, based on the situation and need.

As new concepts and ideas are presented by employees, an effective and efficient process will be developed and implemented that allows for review and evaluation by a broad representation of Department personnel, especially supervisory personnel. By providing opportunities for appropriate feedback, the Senior Leadership Team will review with a perspective to support new methods for business operations rather than appearing to be a road-block. Final decisions will be made by the Senior Leadership Team, with timely feedback to those employees who brought forth the new proposal. The objective of the process will be to encourage acts of leadership at all levels of the organization.

It is also important to understand that all the goals and objectives cannot be implemented at the same time with the expectation of success. The plan will be prioritized and implemented with the assistance of personnel at all levels of the organization with support from the Senior Leadership and Supervisory

Teams, and may involve various work groups to evaluate, research, and vet various aspects of a specific goal/objective for implementation.

The Senior Leadership Team will serve as “Platform Leaders” for each Platform (see immediate pages following, pgs 20-25). In some cases, the work will require continuation of some of the “issue groups” that have been working over the past several months to conclude their specific work that has already begun. In other cases, new work groups will be established to address a specific goal and related objectives in order to obtain needed input from all levels and units within the Department. And, in some cases, the work will be accomplished through the sole work of the Senior Leadership Team. In all cases, there is a commitment to involve whatever staff and resources necessary to fully understand and vet the issue at hand, and develop and implement the most useful business practices possible. Through the use of our “collective intelligence” the Department will be stronger and more capable of reaching our goals and objectives over the next five years.

After two years of diligent, focused, and collaborative dialogue among the Department’s leadership, supervisory, and front-line staff, the Department’s Strategic Plan has been clearly defined. This plan will be the roadmap for our journey as we move forward to best serve our community for the next five years. We realize that adjustments may need to be made as we consider other opportunities or threats that evolve over time. However, we agree that the Platforms and Strategic Goals that have been created are based on the insight and input from staff at all levels of the organization, are reflective of how we collectively see our role in creating a healthy organizational climate for personnel to function, and are intended to implement the most effective services possible to meet the needs of juvenile offenders and their families in Tarrant County.

**PLATFORM: LEADERSHIP**

**Platform Leader:** Ken Harris

**GOAL 1: Create alignment around the culture of departmental leadership**

*Objective 1:* Strengthen leadership at executive, senior and mid-management levels through delineation and clarification of roles and expectations

*Objective 2:* Ensure alignment between the organizational structure and the roles and responsibilities of leadership

*Objective 3:* Model behaviors that make individual and collective leadership commitments visible

**GOAL 2: Establish practices that foster visibility, transparency, and inclusion throughout the organization**

*Objective 1:* Utilize decision-making strategies that appropriately inform and allocate issues to the right place in the organization for action

*Objective 2:* Support empowerment of decision-making across divisional lines and at the lowest appropriate level for effective resolution

**GOAL 3: Create an environment of accountability to the leadership culture and to department standards and practices at all levels of the organization**

*Objective 1:* Adopt strategies that encourage conformity of practice to policy, practices and standards across divisions

*Objective 2:* Build trust through establishing a culture of ongoing feedback about leadership commitments

## **PLATFORM: EMPLOYEE AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**Platform Leader:** Sheryl Eagleton

**GOAL 1:** Create an environment in which hiring practices, training opportunities, deployment of personnel, staff evaluation, promotions, and employee development are fair, consistent and objective

*Objective 1:* Create guidelines to govern interviewing and hiring practices, personnel deployment and employee promotions

*Objective 2:* Provide departmental training that targets employee growth and utilizes leadership mentoring to support informal leadership opportunities at all levels

*Objective 3:* Strengthen employee evaluation processes by utilizing alternative strategies that yield individualized feedback specific to employee performance and development

**GOAL 2:** Maintain a healthy and supportive culture that empowers employees and promotes trust, where employees are valued and recognized for their contributions to the organization

*Objective 1:* Honor commitments to use adaptive leadership principles to support a healthy and trustworthy work environment

*Objective 2:* Support employee recognition by implementing activities that promote and acknowledge positive employee achievement

## **PLATFORM: COMMUNICATION**

**Platform Leader:** Ron Lewis

**GOAL 1:** Ensure that departmental communications are unified, consistent, timely and efficient

*Objective 1:* Develop communication strategies to improve and integrate effective communication at all levels

*Objective 2:* Utilize available technology to enhance communication within the department and with the community

**GOAL 2: Improve organizational communication through employee input on organizational planning, practices, and procedures**

*Objective 1:* Create opportunities for employees to provide input into policy and procedures, and initiatives that are being considered for implementation

*Objective 2:* Develop a system to ensure policy and procedures remain updated and are disseminated to all employees

**PLATFORM: CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC COMPETENCY (CLC)**

**Platform Leader: Bennie Medlin**

**GOAL 1: Establish and maintain an organizational culture that reflects CLC practices, including agency workforce, community resources, and service provision to youth and families.**

*Objective 1:* Provide a comprehensive internal CLC training curriculum to help staff become knowledgeable and proficient at delivering services that reflect CLC values

*Objective 2:* Conduct an organizational assessment to guide organizational planning and initiatives to enhance CLC practices

*Objective 3:* Collaborate with community-based programs and contract providers to establish CLC practices in the delivery of program services

*Objective 4:* Evaluate, revise and develop policies, procedures, contracts, job descriptions and relevant business rules to ensure they reflect the commitment to CLC practices

**GOAL 2: Address disproportionality and disparity within systems, institutions, and communities that impact youth and families**

*Objective 1:* Identify key community stakeholders that can assist the department with DMC reduction efforts

*Objective 2:* Adopt a DMC Reduction Model that can be used to guide the department's DMC reduction efforts

*Objective 3:* Utilize the results of on-going DMC evaluation in TCJS to provide regular reports to staff and community stakeholders on race and ethnicity of youth at key decision points in the system

*Objective 4:* Identify and work to achieve measurable goals for improvement at one or more contact points in which the department has a direct influence on the outcome

**PLATFORM: PREVENTION PLANNING AND CASE MANAGEMENT**

**Platform Leader: Rhonda Kerl**

**GOAL 1: Develop and implement uniform, strength-based, family-focused case management practices**

*Objective 1:* Complete a review of the research literature and establish best case management practices at each point of contact

*Objective 2:* Create and implement a clear, concise and comprehensive definition of best case management practices that aligns with the Mission, Vision, and Values of our agency

*Objective 3:* Assess the current functioning of the agency as it relates to the definition of case management

**GOAL 2: Improve outcomes for youth, families, and victims utilizing the principles of restorative justice and prevention practices**

*Objective 1:* Increase opportunities to incorporate restorative justice principles within our case management practices

*Objective 2:* Enhance capacity to identify and divert youth who can be better served in other systems



**PLATFORM: RESOURCES**

**Platform Leader: Debby Butler**

**GOAL 1: Strengthen timeliness and accessibility to resources for all youth and families at all points in the continuum county-wide**

*Objective 1:* Increase Probation Officers' knowledge of community services and resources

*Objective 2:* Partner with the community to improve and broaden services based on the needs of the family

**GOAL 2: Improve outcomes for youth and families by applying the principles of effective intervention in the development, implementation, and evaluation of resources**

*Objective 1:* Enhance the ability of the department to adhere to the needs and responsibility principles for the population we serve

*Objective 2:* Enhance and expand the use of evidence-based principles and best practices in the development, selection, and evaluation of resources

**PLATFORM: PARTNERSHIPS**

**Platform Leader: Marihelen Wieberg**

**GOAL 1: Provide education and align activities among juvenile justice stakeholders**

*Objective 1:* Develop or enhance avenues for the community to access current information about the department

*Objective 2:* Utilize our working collaborations with stakeholders to create alignment on shared service delivery

*Objective 3:* Educate stakeholders on the Tarrant County juvenile justice system

**GOAL 2: Enhance and foster working relationships with traditional and emerging juvenile justice stakeholders**

*Objective 1:* Initiate opportunities for stakeholders to engage in a dialogue concerning the quality and mutual benefits of our partnership

*Objective 2:* Value and model principles of family engagement

*Objective 3:* Consistently utilize a community wrap-around approach

