

New Task Force to Examine Child Crisis Response in Travis County

A new Children's Mental Health Crisis Services Task Force is considering how we can improve mental health crisis services for children in our community. The Task Force, co-chaired by Sheriff Sally Hernandez and Emmitt Hayes, includes educators, law enforcement, child-serving agencies, mental health providers and health providers. The Task Force, will work over the next 9 months to develop its recommendations.

The Task Force was created as an outcome of a Children's Mental Health Leadership Summit that took place in October 2017. Over the last 2 years, many organizations and agencies in Austin have worked collaboratively to implement the [Travis County Plan for Children's Mental Health](#), which was completed in 2015. The Summit provided an opportunity to check how well we are doing, as a community, in implementing the Plan. One goal of the plan is to respond effectively to children, youth and families in crisis. As partnering organizations have worked to implement the plan, they have realized that a more focused effort is needed to improve the crisis response system for children and families.

One major question the Task Force will be asking: Is adequate intermediate crisis care available? If a child does not require immediate hospitalization but needs more than a once-weekly visit with a counselor, are there enough accessible intermediate care resources in our community? An example of intermediate care could be an intensive outpatient program, where a child might receive day treatment or be seen 3 afternoons a week.

According to Chelsea Garcia, LCSW, of Communities In Schools of Central Texas, "Every kid is wearing an invisible backpack full of their personal history. One child may be sleeping in a one-bedroom apartment with three families, another isn't getting breakfast, and another has a parent struggling with a mental or physical health condition. Child crises can occur across all socio-economic classes." In addition, not all crises look the same. Some but not all may involve suicidal ideation. Aggression towards others and complex trauma, rendering the child unable to regulate emotions and affecting their functioning in the classroom, also count as crises.

Sheriff Hernandez is fully committed to the Task Force. Hernandez says, "Improving the way we approach the mental health crisis in our communities is a top priority of mine. I'm so glad to be part of this task force and am committed to fostering a better future for us all through serving the needs of children. Together, we will offer nurturing care that is easily accessed. Together, we will extend a helping hand and offer hope. Together, we will set a better course for the next generation."

The Task Force will have recommendations ready to share with the community by October of 2018. For more information, contact Mary.Dodd@IntegralCare.org.