

Agency Name: Fort Bend County Juvenile Probation Department
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Project Title: C.O.R.E. Program
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Profile Information

Applicant Agency Name: Fort Bend County Juvenile Probation Department
Project Title: C.O.R.E. Program
Division or Unit to Administer the Project: Fort Bend County Juvenile Probation Department
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Start Date: 10/1/2020
End Date: 9/30/2021

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Headquarter County: Fort Bend
Counties within Project's Impact Area:

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The C.O.R.E. (Creating Opportunities Through Rehabilitation and Empowerment) Program, which includes an all-female Court, is designed to combat female juvenile delinquency and provide services to girls, ages 13 to 17 years of age who are at-risk or victims of Human/Sex Trafficking. The risk level of the girls will be medium to high. The needs that will be addressed include: low self-esteem, lack of positive role models, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), lack of self-worth and negative behaviors. In addition, the program will collaborate with schools to monitor educational success to include attendance, grade performance, and positive social interaction with other students and school staff. The Fort Bend County Juvenile Probation Department's (FBCJPD) Licensed Psychologist, Licensed Professional Counselors and the Probation Officers use a comprehensive assessment and case management process that addresses both criminogenic needs and protective factors from the moment the youth enters the system until they exit.

Problem Statement:

There is an increasing number of 13 to 17 year old girls being referred to the juvenile justice system who are at risk of, or are, currently involved in human sex trafficking, and there is an alarming deficit of

juvenile justice system programs and services needed to change these antisocial attitudes and behaviors. Taken from the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, "while human trafficking is a global problem, it is a Texas problem. School age children are vulnerable to the manipulation and exploitation tactics of traffickers. Unfortunately, law enforcement has confirmed cases of trafficking occurring on school grounds, school events, and even carried out by classmates." This occurs regardless of your race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or zip code. "Traffickers prey upon vulnerability, and children and youth are inherently vulnerable" (Taken from the Office of the Texas Governor website). History has shown that traffickers are the very people our kids trust; school friends, family members, teachers, bus drivers, coaches, and others. Few crimes are more abhorrent than child trafficking, and few crimes are more challenging for communities to recognize and address. As best stated by the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, "For many people, the reality of trafficking in their community is difficult to comprehend, let alone confront. For educators and school personnel, the reality of these crimes and the severity of their impact are cause for a call to action." With that said, it is certain that school personnel cannot address these concerns alone. It is essential that the C.O.R.E. Program be allowed to increase awareness among the community, define a plan of action, and collaborate with other Fort Bend County agencies (i.e. schools, child protective services, law enforcement, social services, and community-based service providers). The C.O.R.E. program offers the collaboration with the juvenile Court system, juvenile justice system, local school entities, behavioral health services, and community based resources to prevent or combat any issues that arise from sex trafficking.

Supporting Data:

The need for having a girl's program for victims of human / sex trafficking in Fort Bend County is demonstrated by a number of facts including Greater Houston being a part of the "Texas Trafficking Triangle" which includes Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio. According to The National Human Trafficking Hotline, there were 10,949 human trafficking cases reported in the United States in 2018, of which 1000 cases occurred in Texas. An astounding 21.7 percent (2,378) of these cases included minors and 65.1 percent (7,126) were females, and these are just the cases reported. With additional education, awareness, and support our children will be less susceptible to entering the human trafficking realm. Historically, a large percentage of advertisements on social media were daily escort ads. Thorn.org reports that in 2019 there were 150,000 new escort ads posted online every day, further stating, "somewhere in that pile of data are children who are bought and sold online for sex."

Project Approach & Activities:

A comprehensive approach includes a variety of programs and services that will be provided to the girls. Assessments and evaluations will consist of the PACT Assessment (Positive Achievement Change Tool), C.O.R.E. Screening Tool, family and drug assessments. Behavioral health services provided will include a gender specific program with an evidence based curriculum; self-esteem building; family, individual, group, and substance abuse counseling; crisis intervention and safety planning. In addition to these programs, the guiding treatment approach for the C.O.R.E. Program is Trauma Informed Care. The

C.O.R.E. team is sensitive and mindful that human sex trafficking is a global form of oppression that places adolescents and children at risk for sexual exploitation. Individual Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavior Therapy (ITF-CBT), family therapy, group therapy, and parent individual therapy (when warranted) are the treatment modalities utilized in C.O.R.E. The C.O.R.E. therapist and team will strive to gain a deeper understanding of the indicators and processes through which the client became trafficked, which allows the C.O.R.E. therapist and team to individualize intervention and rehabilitation services. The therapist is mindful of how force, fraud, and coercion impact the adolescent. C.O.R.E. services delivered in a trauma-sensitive manner encourages all involved in service provision to understand complex trauma, including symptoms and behaviors, possible outcomes, reasons for silence, and insight into victim thoughts, beliefs, and feelings. Trauma sensitive knowledge, approach, and delivery are all needed for victims to heal. Crime prevention includes appearing in a C.O.R.E. specific Court, which includes an all-female team (i.e. Judge, Prosecutor, Defense Attorney, and specialized Juvenile Probation staff). This Court challenges criminogenic attitudes and thinking in order to promote a more productive future. Additionally, when possible, networking with law enforcement agencies to bring human traffickers to justice. The program will offer reentry services, which will include (but not limited to) the coordination of a work-study program (Transitions Program), positive female role models (staff and mentors), monthly Life Skills Activities, educational services (i.e. GED, tutoring, My Reading Coach, etc.), C.O.R.E. team support, and post-supervision services.

Capacity & Capabilities:

Fort Bend County developed a Human Trafficking Task Force on October 01, 2013. This task force initiated educational outreach through the Fort Bend County Human Trafficking summit on February 21, 2014, additional training for targeted audiences through the Traffic911 organization, and legislative initiatives. After weeks of discussion and listening to subject experts, "it became apparent that the issue of prostitution has evolved to include more domestic minors who often are lured or kidnapped and then forced into prostitution activity". FBCJPD employs a licensed psychologist, licensed professional counselors, trained specialized probation officers to work with at-risk juveniles, and a licensed substance abuse counselor. Additionally, the department employs staff trained in providing educational services, career readiness programs, mentoring, parent support programs, etc. The project will also include a C.O.R.E. Court component with a female Judge, female prosecutor, and a female defense attorney allowing the department to collaborate the best course of action for the juvenile.

Performance Management:

Data will be collected through the Juvenile Case Management System (JCMS) to include demographics, chronological notes, and program / supervision success rates. Additionally, success will be measured with the PACT assessment and subsequent reassessments. Staffing notes, counseling / program attendance logs, therapeutic notes, mentoring hours, and school records will also be collected and evaluated.

Target Group:

The target population of the program will be female juvenile offenders who are between the ages of 13 and 17-years-old. The juvenile will have a medium to high level of risk based on the PACT Assessment, identified as a confirmed or high-risk trafficking victim, or at risk of trafficking on the TJD sex trafficking screening form. Additionally, identified needs will include trauma focused therapy, gender specific programs, an individualized clinical plan, positive female role models, and educational services.

Evidence-Based Practices:

Victims of human trafficking undergo psychological and emotional distress that leads to intense trauma reactions. The trauma reactions are often characterized as PTSD. Such reactions will impact individuals differently demonstrating a wide array of complex trauma related behaviors and symptoms. By incorporating a trauma focused CBT approach, the C.O.R.E. team can address each client's emotion and psychological distress as an individual rather than as a PTSD label. The C.O.R.E. team will meet weekly to screen and develop and individualized trauma focused informed care plan.

For information purposes, the following are descriptions of PTSD and CBT:

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder – a condition of persistent mental and emotional distress occurring as a result of injury or severe psychological shock, typically involving disturbance of sleep and constant vivid recall of the experience(s). Common symptoms include: flashbacks, nightmares, panic attacks, eating disorders, cognitive delays, and avoidance of certain stimuli. Many individuals attempt to self-medicate the negative effects of PTSD with substance use.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a type of counseling treatment that helps clients / patients understand the thoughts and feelings that influence their behavior. CBT is commonly used to treat a wide range of psychological disorders including phobias, addictions, depression, and anxiety. CBT involves recognizing negative thinking patterns and is based on several core principles including:

1. Psychological problems are based, in part, on faulty or unhelpful ways of thinking.
2. Psychological problems are based, in part, on learned patterns of unhelpful behavior.
3. People suffering from psychological problems can learn better ways of coping with them, thereby relieving their symptoms and becoming more effective in their lives.