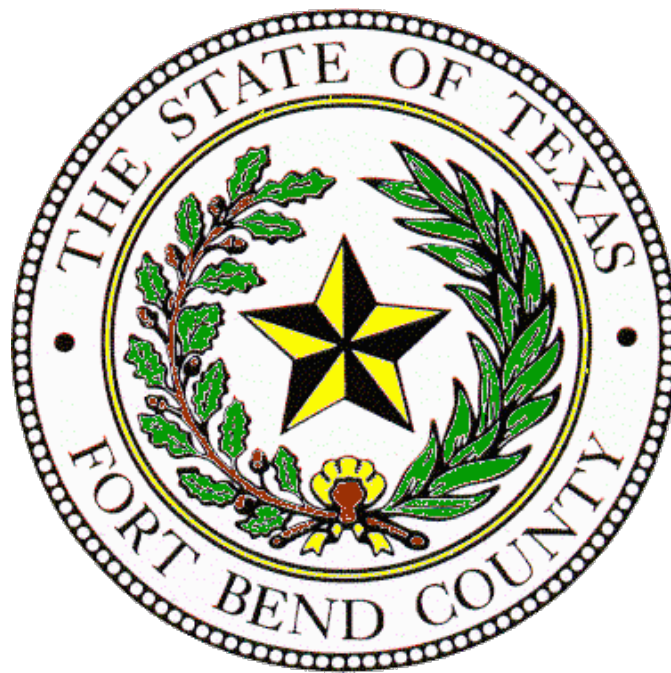


# **Fort Bend County First Responders Suicide Prevention Final Report**



*October 6, 2020*

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# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## **OVERVIEW:**

Historically, September is marked as National Suicide Awareness Month, a time destined to raise awareness for suicide prevention while engaging communities. In Fort Bend County, September 15<sup>th</sup> marks a year since the tragic death of a beloved partner, wife, mother, and public servant. Following the death of Deputy Chief Kathleen “Kat” Marie Hartley, the Fort Bend County Office of Emergency Medical Services in partnership with other law and behavioral health departments laid the foundation for a growing initiative that prioritizes the mental health and wellbeing of Fort Bend County Frontline Workers. Her passing catalyzed the importance of mental and emotional needs of our first responders and in her memory, her family collected money for Worcester Youth and Family Counseling Services, Inc. to support those in a similar position as Kathleen. The following report details specific actions taken by the Fort Bend County law enforcement and other collaborative departments to develop an accountable system for law enforcement worker’s mental health and wellbeing. Thoughtfully produced, the proposed structures will provide workers with confidential counseling options, accountability partners from their own organization, safety assessments, and comprehensive checkpoints to determine if a case has reached the crisis situation. Thus, the work gathered has and continues to produce a lasting impact on the families of our first responders with the life and loving memory of Chief Hartley as a constant motivation for excellence.

Developmental work in the mental health field first began in the Office of Emergency Medical Services began a partnership with the Emergency Chaplin Group in 2018. With the mission of providing spiritual, emotional, and mental support to the First Responder Community, their families, and the citizens of Fort Bend County, this group has played a major role in the design and careful implementation of the program. Community and professional awareness for mental health in Fort Bend County continued to grow with the Behavioral Health Department with the Crisis Intervention Team Mental Health Training in fall 2019 and the Children’s Mental Health Seminar in January 2020 increasing the capacity of trained professionals to care for their clients. From here, the county’s progress continues to skyrocket as officers now have extended counseling offices and a full set of action items described on page 10. The progress made in a single year shapes the future of Fort Bend County First Responder’s mental health awareness and needs as we work hard to ensure they are heard, comfortable, and receive quality care.

## **OBJECTIVES:**

*To care for the mental and emotional needs of Fort Bend County First Responders and limit the stigma in the law enforcement field behind mental health through:*

Partnering with third party counseling organizations strategically located in proximity to the homes of first responders. In addition to this, the initiative strives to make these accessible with insurance and other benefits.

Bringing together relevant departments like Human Resources, EMS, Behavioral Health, Risk Management, and more to centralize efforts and produce outcomes that are more effective.

Development of a comprehensive checklist to determine if a case is critical which includes a safety assessment and unique safety plan based on the case. This plan acts with the goal of returning the responder to work as safely and healthy, as possible.

Assign department accountability partners to ensure that all are accounted for and feel comfortable in their environment.

Raising community awareness regarding mental health and suicide prevention to address the issue at its core and create a stronger and healthier community.

# **MEMBERSHIP**

## **Department of Behavioral Health:**

*Dr. Connie Almeida*

## **Fort Bend County Sheriff's Office:**

*Captain Matt Carter*

*Lt. Jerome Ellis*

*Tiffaney Budnik*

*Jule Brownfield*

*Sondra Zouzalik*

## **Risk Management:**

*Wyatt Scott*

*J.T. Pena*

## **Fort Bend County Human Resources:**

*Kent Edwards*

*Kathleen Novosad*

## **Fort Bend County EMS/Health & Human Services:**

*Chief Graig Temple*

*Adesope, Ben*

*Minter, Jacquelyn*

*Kaiser, Tara*

*Atripaldi, Robert*

*Nixon, Michael*

*Harrison, Jamie*

*Curtiss Lanham. Department Chaplain*

# TIMELINE OF MENTAL HEALTH AND FIRST RESPONDER MEETINGS

## SEPTEMBER 2019

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Members convened at the Historic Courthouse on September 20, 2019, 5 days after the passing of Deputy Chief Kathleen Marie.

## OCTOBER 2019

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Members convened at the Historic Courthouse on October 8, 2019.

## NOVEMBER 2019

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Members convened at the Historic Courthouse on November 7, 2019.

## DECEMBER 2019

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Members convened at the Historic Courthouse on December 10, 2019.

## JULY 2020

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*Members convened virtually on July 1, 2020 to discuss progress made in the six month period of no meetings due to COVID-19. The meeting began with a discussion of the proposed algorithm for identification of crisis situations. Members continued to discuss a partnership with Deer Oaks and other counseling agencies that will provide quality care to first responders. Importantly, the group worked to expand agreements with local centers for in-patient crisis management and ensure that all selected providers are insurance acceptable and have the appropriate background to assist those in a first responder role. EMS recapped their series of “Coffee Talks” where EMS Workers provided critical feedback about the need for perspective, continuity, and inclusion as they approach the delicate topic of mental health. Finally, with COVID-19 upon us the group is working to expand the use of telehealth to make sure all programs are accessible for all comfort levels.*

## AUGUST 2020

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Members convened virtually on August 6, 2020 to...

# ACCOMPLISHMENTS BY DEPARTMENT

## Department of Behavioral Health:

*The Department of Behavioral Health conducted a series of Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Mental Health Trainings, held Children's Mental Health Seminars, and presented a variety of mental health resources to support Fort Bend County throughout the pandemic. You will find a list of these efforts and resources below.*

- **CIT Mental Health Training**
  - *Tonya Martin, Psy. D., Danielle Todaro, Psy.D.*
  - *October, November, September, 2019 and July 2020*
- **Presentation on Grief for Drug Court**
  - *Danielle Todaro, Psy.D.*
- **Children MH Seminar**
  - *Connie Almeida, Ph.D. LSSP, Susan M. Profilet, Ph.D.*
- **Fort Bend Townhall on Mental Health Crisis from Coronavirus Pandemic**
  - *Mental Health Task Force and Dr. Shah*
- **May is MH Month: Children's MH Day- Child/Adolescent Depression & Anxiety**
  - *Connie Almeida, Ph.D. LSSP, Tonya Martin, Psy. D., Susan M. Profilet, Ph.D.*
- **Anxiety & Fears w/COVID-19**
  - *Christin L. Lee, M.S., L.P.A., Danielle Todaro, Psy.D.*
- **May is MH Month: Compassion Fatigue**
  - *Connie Almeida, Ph.D. LSSP, Christin L. Lee, M.S., L.P.A., Danielle Todaro, Psy.D., Tonya Martin, Psy.D.*
- **Resiliency: Our Ability to Cope and Thrive**
  - *Connie Almeida, Ph.D. LSSP*
- **Managing Stress and the Pandemic**
  - *Dr. Almeida & Sue Levin*
- **Building Resilience in Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic**
  - *Susan M. Profilet, Ph.D., Connie Almeida, Ph.D, LSSP*
- **Coping with the Novelties of COV-19: Stressors, Mental Health Symptoms, & Events Unique to the Pandemic**
  - *Tonya Martin, Psy. D.*
- **Multi-Cultural Awareness**
  - *Christin L. Lee, M.S., L.P.A*
- **Social Deprivation and COVID**
  - *Dr. Shah, Dr. Almeida & Dr. Storch*
- **COVID-19 & Mental Health in Children & Adults**
  - *Tonya Martin, Psy. D.*
  - *Additional Panelists: Celeste Conlon, Ph.D. & Dr. Shel*

- **COVID-19 AND Impact on MH Service Delivery**
    - *Panel - The Harris Center, Harris County Psychiatric Center and BHS*
  - **MH supports during COVID-19**
    - *Connie Almeida, Ph.D. LSSP*
  - **Crisis Intervention Team and Mental Health**
    - *Fort Bend County Crisis Intervention Team & Connie Almeida, Ph.D. LSSP*
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### **Department of Human Resources:**

*The Department of Human Resources joined the First Responders Mental Health Workgroup in June 2019. The objectives of that first meeting were to discuss mental health concerns of EMS providers and response to those concerns, gain a better understanding of the current EAP services, and consider modifications and improvements to mental health response, including identifying alternative healthcare programs.*

*Throughout the course of the past year, Human Resources participated in the group by providing information on the EAP mandatory referral process and the successes and failures of that process, as well as highlighted some of the pitfalls of using the EAP as the gate-keeper to mental health services for EMS and all employees. Understanding the process helped the group better navigate the referrals and remove barriers to care.*

*Another focus of the Group has been heightening awareness of mental health issues in our employee population, and encouraging employees to focus on mental health wellness and self-care. One outcome of this was a revision to the Sick Leave Policy of the Employee Manual, to permit the use of sick leave for purposes of attending to stress relief and self-care.*

*As a member of the team, Human Resources also evaluated current and proposed practices to ensure compliance with employment laws, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act and Equal Employment Opportunity, and ensure confidentiality of employee medical information. HR has also facilitated communications with employees on mental health topics.*

*Significant progress was made to identify, increase, and enhance the availability of mental health care for first responders. Human Resources will continue to assist in communications and training on mental health topics, and participate in continuous improvement of processes to assist employees in need.*

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## **Department of Emergency Medical Services (EMS):**

- 2018 – Initiated a Contract with the Emergency Chaplain Group (EMChap)
- 2019 – Meetings with Fort Bend County Departments (Judge’s Office, HHS, Behavioral Health Services, HR, Risk Management, FBCSO CIT/CISM and EMS) regarding EMS Specific MH and Wellness needs
- 2019 – September 15, 2019 Department suffered the death by suicide of Deputy Chief “Kat” Hartley
- 2019 – Department meeting with UT Professor regarding Suicide Awareness
- 2019 – Total end of year activation total of Chaplain Lanham and the EMChap Contract - 170
- 2020 – Application to the Texas Governor’s Office / Department of Justice for a grant related to the Mental Health and Wellness of First Responders
- 2020 – Established a Relationship By Objectives (RBO) Workgroup - Members attended MH and Wellness seminar in The Woodlands, TX
- 2020 – Month of May identified as (Mental Health Month) and Awareness, Prevention and Treatment information pushed to the FBCEMS Staff
- 2020 – Approval of an Employee/Department MH and Wellness flowchart
- 2020 – Support from Risk Management to remove the EAP/Insurance gate holder steps, thus streamlining employee MH and Wellness care; Additional Service Providers both locally and regionally being vetted; Added the EAP contact number on future Insurance Card updates.
- 2020 - Currently awaiting the decision on the Mental Health and Wellness Grant that will help fund additional Peer Support training as well as group sessions.

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## **Sheriff’s Office:**

*In accordance with the Behavioral Health Department, the Sheriff’s Office worked to develop a crisis intervention project, and offer mental health officer training. Below you will find specific information detailing the efforts made by both departments in response to mental health in Fort Bend County and was crafted by Elina Saeki, Ph.D., DeAndrea Newton, and M. Connie Almeida, Ph.D.*

# Fort Bend County Behavioral Health Services Crisis Intervention Project

*Behavioral Health Crisis Response and Intervention  
An 1115 Waiver Funded Program*

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Fort Bend County (FBC) proposed to develop a crisis system that better identifies individuals with mental and behavioral health needs, responds to those needs, and links individuals with their most appropriate level of care. The primary objective of the project involves connecting individuals with appropriate services and preventing unnecessary incarceration and emergency room utilization. Interventions that prevent individuals from entering and/or cycling through the criminal justice system can help avert poor physical and mental health outcomes, reduce long term medical costs, and improve overall functioning.



The FBC Behavioral Health Crisis Response and Intervention project includes: (1) assessment and enhancement of first response systems (e.g., 911 dispatch) to identify and respond to behavioral health crises, (2) development of a specialized crisis intervention team (CIT) within FBC Sheriff's Office, and (3) implementation of cross systems and linkages to appropriate services and supports.

Please see chart below, which provides the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) year to date contact data.

Month	Total Contacts	Total Follow Ups	Unique Contacts	Medicaid Only	Uninsured	Dual (Insurance + Medicaid)	Insurance Only	Veterans	Juveniles	IDD	Substance Use	Transports	Referrals
Oct-19	152	13	140	38	39	9	53	7	40	6	17	6	5
Nov-19	154	18	142	30	47	9	56	4	36	13	13	5	4
Dec-19	157	16	138	30	53	5	49	2	34	11	17	2	10
Jan-20	195	22	166	35	44	12	74	5	37	9	20	1	8
Feb-20	181	12	142	31	48	6	57	4	45	9	10	1	7
Mar-20	191	33	153	35	38	11	68	3	33	10	20	3	8
Apr-20	188	12	143	29	42	8	64	3	27	7	18	2	9
May-20	150	10	114	26	34	6	48	7	21	7	14	0	4
Jun-20	103	5	81	9	36	5	30	2	9	3	7	0	2
Jul-20	101	5	73	9	25	6	32	1	10	3	8	0	2
Aug-20	99	5	74	9	27	5	31	5	9	2	12	0	4
Sep-20													
Total for DY9	1671	151	1366	281	433	82	562	43	301	80	156	20	63
					796								

The chart below summarizes the total contacts as well as the unique individuals from August 2019 - August 2020.

### Total Contacts and Total Unique Contacts

Month	August 2019 - August 2020	
	Total Contacts	Unique Contacts
Aug-19	177	147
Sep-19	138	112
Oct-19	152	140
Nov-19	154	142
Dec-19	157	138
Jan-20	195	166
Feb-20	181	142
Mar-20	191	153
Apr-20	188	143
May-20	150	114
Jun-20	103	81
Jul-20	101	73
Aug-20	99	74
	1986	1625

Listed below, the number of jail diversions, conducted by CIT, have been provided in the year to date as well as from August 2019 – August 2020.

### Jail Diversions

Month	Total Jail Diversions	Total Jail Diversion Family	Unique Contact Jail Diversion Family	Total Jail Diversion Other	Unique Contact Jail Diversion Other
Oct-19	16	3	3	13	12
Nov-19	26	2	2	24	24
Dec-19	19	4	4	15	12
Jan-20	19	5	5	14	14
Feb-20	17	1	1	16	15
Mar-20	24	3	3	21	20
Apr-20	23	2	2	21	18
May-20	13	3	3	10	9
Jun-20	5	3	2	9	9
Jul-20	17	1	1	16	16
Aug-20	5	1	1	4	4
Sep-20	0				
<b>Total for DY9</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>153</b>
			<b>180</b>		

	August 2019 - August 2020
Total Jail Diversions	211

# Fort Bend County Mental Health Officer Training

## Mental Health Officer Training

Fort Bend County has been offering a 40-hour, 1-week mental health officer training course for first responders in Fort Bend County Sheriff's Office, surrounding City police departments, and the Fort Bend County Independent School District officers since 2014. This training was part of the Action Plan delineated in the 1115 Waiver Crisis Intervention and Response Gap Analysis and Needs Assessment completed in September 2013. The Gap Analysis revealed a lack of training of first responders (e.g., officers, dispatch, EMS) to respond to special populations, including individuals with mental illness.

These trainings focus broadly on mental illness, including signs and symptoms of various mental illnesses, intersect between mental illness and other disorders and conditions (e.g., substance use/abuse, medical conditions), appropriate way to interact with individuals with mental illness, and special considerations for individuals and caregivers.

The total number of first responders trained from **August 2019 to August 2020** was **194**. These training records are maintained by the George Gus Academy staff and monitored by the Behavioral Health Services department.

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### **Department of Risk Management:**

*The Department of Risk Management has made tremendous efforts towards removing the gate-keeper language used in the Risk Management Plan document. Once Risk Management has concluded the review with the other Plan language changes with the County Attorney's Office, it will be immediately presented to the Court for approval and immediately effective. The Risk Management team in accordance with EMS and other groups, all felt that by removing this language, this small change would be a huge step forward in making access to mental health resources much easier. All of the Vendors but one, who EMS would like to use, are in-network.*

# FORWARD

*While the amount of progress made in a single year is astounding, the initiative continues to work toward measurable impact to ensure the life and mental wellbeing of our responders is prioritized and protected.*

Future initiatives to continue progress include:

1. The establishment of quarterly meetings including October 2020 and January 2021  
**Goal:** to finalize the progress we have made within the County and proceed with a County-Wide Task Force.
2. The establishment of a County-Wide Task Force including county departments, healthcare, education specialists, faith-based partners, and our law enforcement offices.  
**Goal:** (1) to have the same representatives from the initial First Responders Mental Health Committee representatives from the County; (2) conduct quarterly meetings; (3) establish a resource network for the community.
3. Additional mental health summits and forums done by the Behavioral Health Department and partners to continue to eliminate the stigma behind mental health and raise awareness amongst our diverse community. Currently, the department has gathered resources into a visual for our community that highlights National Suicide Prevention Awareness Day. This information will continue to be distributed as Fort Bend County tackles suicide with resources, knowledge, and empathy.  
**Goals:** (1) to increase representations from school districts (social workers/nurses), faith based community leaders and support staff, healthcare workers and hospital districts. To increase the agencies/organizations represented from last years; (2) to offer more seminars throughout the year to address various issues surrounding mental health issues, specifically focusing on the faith based community and the youth; (3) and to increase attendees' awareness on first responder mental health.
4. Future Training for Mental Health Crisis.  
**Goal:** to increase the number of First Responders by an additional 15-20 who are currently trained on interacting with members of the public who are having mental health crises. Increasing this number to over 200 trained in mental health crises.

The progress and tracking of the goals will remain within the County Judge's Office until the transition is made to a County-Wide Task Force. Once the First Responders Mental Health Committee has fully transitioned, then goals will be reassessed and a designee will be determined who will be responsible for progress and tracking.

Through the partnership of county officials, elected offices, law enforcement, faith-based partners, education providers, and healthcare specialists Fort Bend County can only improve their first responder services and expand this outreach into other areas. Fort Bend County is destined to be the example for first responder care and compassion as we develop invital resources that define the future of law enforcement relations.