

COMMUNITY PLAN

Eastland County

FY2025-FY2028

Eastland County Community Plan 2024

EASTLAND COUNTY
COMMUNITY PLANNING GROUP
COMMUNITY PLAN 2024

The Eastland County Community Planning Group has identified and prioritized the following problems, resources, and gaps in resources that affect Eastland County:

I. CRIME

A. Issues

1. Crimes against children
 - (a) Online predatory activity
 - (b) Homeless students
2. Crime victimization (including family violence and sexual assault)
3. Drugs
 - (a) Abuse (Legal and Illegal)
 - (b) Trafficking (Legal and Illegal)
 - (c) Manufacturing (Illegal)
4. Human trafficking
5. Juvenile crime
6. Alcohol abuse-related crimes
7. Crimes against children
 - (a) Online predatory activity
 - (b) Homeless students
8. Identity theft
9. Property Crimes

B. Resources

1. Lawenforcement
 - (a) Municipal police agencies
 - (1) Cisco PD (including animal control and School Resource Officers)
 - (2) Eastland PD (including animal control and School Resource Officers)
 - (3) Ranger PD (including animal control)
 - i. (6) Cisco College PD
 - ii. (7) Eastland County Constables
 - (b) County agencies
 - (1) Eastland County Sheriff's Office
 - (2) Constables
 - (3) Adult Probation
 - (4) Juvenile Probation
 - (5) Criminal District Attorney's Office
 - (6) Eastland Memorial Hospital
 - iii. (c) Regional Agency-West Central Texas Council of Governments

(I. CRIME cont.)

- (d) State agencies
 - (1) Texas Department of Public Safety
 - (i) Texas Rangers
 - (ii) Criminal Intelligence Division
 - (iii) Texas Highway Patrol
 - (2) Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
 - (i) Child Protective Services
 - (ii) Adult Protective Services
 - (3) Division of Emergency Management
 - (4) Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles
 - (5) Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission
 - (6) Office of the Attorney General Crime Victims Compensation Division
 - (7) Office of the Governor, Criminal Justice Division
- (e) Federal agencies
 - (1) Federal Bureau of Investigation
 - (2) Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms
 - (3) U.S. Department of Justice
 - (i) Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS)
 - (ii) Office of Juvenile Justice
 - (4) Department of Homeland Security
- (f) Judicial agencies
 - (1) 91st District Court
 - (2) 11th Court of Appeals
 - (3) Eastland County Court
 - (4) Justice of the Peace courts
 - (5) Municipal courts
- 2. Private-public-social sector citizens/organizations
 - (a) Mental health officer – Justin Harris
 - (b) Alcohol/drugs
 - (1) Abilene Recovery Council
 - (2) Alcoholics Anonymous
 - (3) Narcotics Anonymous
 - (c) Family Violence/Sexual Assault
 - (1) Crime Victims Assistance Center - Eastland
 - (2) Noah Project, Inc. –Abilene
 - (3) The Ark-Brownwood
 - (4) HOPE, Inc. Mineral Wells
 - (6) Beyond Trafficking
 - (5) Freedom House-Weatherford

(I. CRIME cont.)

- (d) Children's services
 - (1) Children's Advocacy Center
 - (2) Eastland County Child Welfare Board
 - (3) Community Resource Coordinating Group (CRCG)
 - (4) TDFPS (CPS/APS)
 - (5) School districts
 - (6) Noah Project, Inc. (Unaccompanied youth shelter up to 14 days)
 - (7) Center for Life Resources
 - (8) The Open Door
- (e) Printed materials/information on Domestic Violence available from:
 - (1) National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
 - (2) Texas Advocacy Project
 - (3) Texas Council on Family Violence
 - (4) National Domestic Violence Hotline
 - (5) Texas Health and Human Services Commission
 - (6) Office of the Attorney General
- (f) Citizen groups
 - (1) Campus Crime Stoppers
 - (2) Crime Stoppers
 - (3) Water/Utility workers
 - (4) Postal workers
 - (5) Neighborhood Watch programs
 - (6) Animal rescue groups
 - (7) Lion's Club
 - (8) Rotary Club
 - (9) Ministerial Alliance
- (g) Therapists/Counselors
 - (1) Crime Victims Assistance Center-domestic violence, sexual abuse, prior child abuse mental health
 - (2) Center for Life Resources - mental health issues
 - (3) Child Advocacy Center-sexual abuse, child abuse, mental health
 - (4) School Districts
 - (5) Myrtle Wilks Community Center
 - (6) Pastoral Care and Counseling-battering intervention/counseling
 - (7) Adult Probation Office -Offender counseling
 - (8) Juvenile Probation Office
 - (9) Beyond Trafficking
 - (10) Starry counseling
 - (11) Oceans Hospital
 - (12) Resource Care Clinics
- (h) Training/education programs
 - (1) Crime Victim Assistance Center
 - (i) Anti-Victimization Programs
 - (ii) Risk Reduction/Awareness Programs
 - (iii) Family Violence/Sexual Assault prevention and response

- (iv) Teen Violence Prevention
- (2) Open Door-parenting education, anger management and GED preparatory classes
- (3) West Central Texas Council of Governments-Regional Law Enforcement Academy-continuing education
- (4) West Central Texas Workforce Solutions
- (5) Area colleges (Cisco, Ranger)
- (6) County Extension office
- (7) Serenity House
- (8) Beyond Trafficking

C. Gaps

The Eastland County Community Planning Group has identified certain areas in which there appear to be less than adequate services and/or resources.

1. Representatives from local agencies expressed appreciation for the one mental health officer and noted the continued need for this officer, and more, based upon the numbers of calls, which were way higher than anticipated, once this position was filled. Committee members continued to emphasize the gaps in services to victims needing crisis mental health services and law enforcement resources. Resources are needed to bridge the gaps to meet the mental health service needs of community members. Mental Health deputies “help improve the crisis response system by diverting people in need of behavioral health crisis services from hospitals and jails to community-based alternatives that provide effective behavioral health treatment at less cost” (<https://hhs.texas.gov/doing-business-hhs/provider-portals/behavioral-health-services-providers/crisis-service-providers/mental-health-deputy>.) A continued need exists for trauma-focused PTSD therapy services in our county. Mental health evaluations cost \$1600-\$1800 per evaluation, which is a huge expense for our county. A gap in service exists for veterans needing local mental and/or other medical services. Due to a lack of funding, services provided by local agencies are extremely limited and calls for service must be prioritized, often resulting in little or no response to less urgent incidents. This contributes to the lack of understanding and lack of communication between the community and the involved agencies. Incidents simply are not given the attention that they deserve, due to a lack of financial resources, which are largely comprised of state and federal funding. Increased demands to retain highly qualified personnel in this identified gap also mean a need for competitive salaries and fringe.
2. In the area of service to victims of violent crime (domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking, dating violence, stalking, etc.), there appear to be gaps in the ability to provide services to those who are fearful of reporting incidents to law enforcement or victim advocate groups and gaps in services to victims with additional medical/mental health needs. With no report to law

enforcement, compensation to victims is non-existent under the Crime Victims Compensation Act. The lack of coordinated agency efforts is further reducing the ability of advocate groups to respond adequately to the needs of victims.

3. Victims need access to free/low-cost legal services and 24/7 advocacy. There is a continued need for a trained victim services attorney who understands the dynamics of domestic violence and sexual assault and can assist victims with their legal needs. Funding for a victim services attorney is needed, as most victims of domestic violence and/or sexual assault cannot afford an attorney to assist them with their legal needs relating to their increased safety and recovery from victimization.
4. Hiring and retaining highly qualified personnel in this identified gap is a need for Eastland County. Positions in our rural area are typically lower paying than most jobs in larger populated areas; however, on-the-job training is provided, so when the staff get trained and have some experience, they often move on to other, higher paying jobs in more metropolitan areas.
5. In the area of emergency response to hazardous materials incidents and terrorist local direct services activities, there is a lack of training and lack of equipment; however, the process of eliminating this problem has begun. There is a hazmat team that responds out of Abilene (approximately 60 miles from Eastland, TX); there are area hazardous response/clean-up companies, but they are contracted, so until the service contracts are in place, they do not respond. The STOPS and "ALERT" programs are implemented, but funding is needed to continue and increase the programs throughout the county. Security at vital locations, such as seats of government and utility providers, is lacking, due to inadequate training, equipment, and personnel. The Community Planning team feels the need for a county-wide tactical response team, which would require funds for staff, training, and equipment. Increased demands to retain highly qualified personnel in this identified gap also mean a need for competitive salaries and fringe.
6. Recent and prior planning session attendees continue to advocate for increased violence prevention awareness programs in schools, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse prevention and reporting. Discussed this year was the increased need for cyber safety awareness and prevention programs to be presented to all ages. Suggestions included that more attention be given to making people aware of the long-term consequences of bad decisions, possibly by bringing in speakers who will address subjects such as bullying, campus safety, Title IX and Title XIX education, sexual harassment, violence prevention, bystander intervention, and cyber safety. Additionally, suggestions for more job fair options and local workforce training and/or apprenticeship programs be available. The

Planning Committee recommends that these programs be started at an earlier age, perhaps in late elementary or early middle grades, and expanded to additional schools. Eastland County Crisis Center offers Title IX sexual assault response training and Title XIX response/implementation support to school officials and law enforcement with more cooperation between entities. The purpose is to assist schools in developing and implementing policies to better prevent and respond to sexual harassment, sexual assault, and child abuse in the area of educational institutions while following their respective entity guidelines.

II. ECONOMY

A. Issues

1. Depressed economy in the area
 - a. Lack of adequately trained workforce
 - (i) Local employment training opportunities
 - (ii) early career education/school vocational training
 - b. Lack of jobs
 - c. Lack of access to the oil industry
 - d. Decline in agricultural economy
 - e. Inadequate economic growth
 - (i) Drought influence on agri-business
 - (ii) lack of workforce to support the non-retail segment of the economy
2. Under-employment to avoid payment of fringe benefits
 - a. Increase in migrant workers
 - b. Increase in health care requirements
3. Lack of housing availability/vacant housing presents nuisance, health & safety issues
4. Drought conditions/inadequate water supply
5. Lack of paid maternity leave

B. Resources

1. Economic Development Corporations
2. Central Texas Opportunities-Eastland office
3. Chambers of Commerce
4. Texas Workforce Commission
5. Cisco College and Ranger College -Vocational Training
6. Agri-Life Extension Service
7. Eastland County Crisis Center
8. West Central Texas Council of Governments Economic District
9. Ranger College food and clothing closet
10. Food Pantries
11. Industrial Foundations
12. Adult Probation
13. Open Door Program-Crisis Pregnancy resources, GED preparatory classes
14. Small Business Center-Tarleton State University
15. 211 Texas (information and referral services)
16. Housing and Urban Development

17. Workforce Solutions
18. Small Business Development Center – Texas Tech at Abilene

C. Gaps

The Eastland County Community Planning Group has identified certain areas in which there appear to be less than adequate services and/or resources.

1. Vocational training, including basic customer service skills
2. Incentives for employers to provide cross-training to employees
3. Adult literacy program
4. Increased job opportunities
5. Funding to promote economic development, and jobs with fringe benefits.
6. Reduced rate of child care, night child care
7. Administration of grants
8. Career counseling/financial planning for youth

III. HOUSING/PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

A. Issues

1. Lack of rental properties, for both short and long-term needs
2. Vacant/run-down structures
3. Limited public transportation
4. Need for housing development property in the private sector
5. Need for local zoning ordinances, building codes, and inspections
6. Need for infrastructure support for real estate development/investment
7. Lack of debris disposal facilities

B. Resources

1. Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS)
2. Adult Protective Services
3. West Central Texas Council of Governments/Area Agency on Aging and Rural Environmental Project
4. Social Security Administration – Abilene
5. West Central Texas Council of Governments/Natural Resources/Waste Management
6. CARR (City and Rural Rides)
7. 2-1-1 Texas (Information and referral services)
8. National Guard
9. Local Prisons
10. Housing and Urban Development
11. Legal Aid of North West Texas-civil issues (income-based)
12. AARP

C. Gaps

The Eastland County Community Planning Group has identified certain areas in which there appear to be less than adequate services and/or resources.

1. Affordable housing for all age groups and varying income levels
2. Demolition or renovation of older, vacant structures

3. Public transportation available 24/7
4. Some systems of checking on elderly citizens daily.
5. Debris disposal so that demolished abandoned structures are properly disposed

IV. HEALTH/MENTAL HEALTH

A. Issues

1. Victimization of mental health clients
2. Increased police personnel time spent on mental health matters
3. Lack of alternatives to incarceration of mentally ill, state beds
4. Wait time for local Mental Health Authority (LMHA) services
5. Transportation to mental health facilities
6. Police/Civil/Social Concerns
7. Increased costs for healthcare
8. Lack of availability of affordable health care insurance
9. Trained veteran response services
10. Lack of funding for emergency services (fire, EMS)

B. Resources

1. Center for Life Resources – Brownwood
2. Eastland Memorial Hospital
3. Social Security Administration
4. Medicare/Medicaid
5. West Central Texas Council of Governments
6. Eastland County (Indigent Health Care)
7. Walnut Street Clinic in Ranger
8. Eastland County Crisis Center-counseling services
9. West Texas Rehabilitation Center
10. 2-1-1 Texas (information and referral services)
11. CRCCG

C. Gaps

The Eastland County Community Planning Group has identified certain areas in which there appear to be less than adequate services and/or resources.

1. Decreases in State funding for mental health organizations and facilities, or reallocation of funds for those needs has created problems for law enforcement in Eastland County due to the lack of resources capable of dealing with mental health issues. Mental health cases that were previously handled by state-funded agencies are now being referred to local law enforcement agencies.
2. Revisions to agency structures and policies for DFPS and the Local Mental Health Authority (LMHA) have resulted in reduced manpower during a time of increasing caseloads. Law enforcement is now faced with dealing with mentally impaired persons and youth-at-risk who do not meet the guidelines or criteria for services previously provided by the State.
3. Changes in staffing, local availability of crisis responders, and in-area mental health care service provider locations have caused a need for more education

about mental health service protocol updates, intake processes, and in-house space availability. Law enforcement officers with specialized mental health peace officer training is needed in the county to work with area mental health care providers and crisis center advocates in working with community members needing law enforcement and/or victim services, along with mental health services.

4. Need for after-hours minor emergency care and/or low-cost clinics. A Rural Health Care clinic has been added to the community. This clinic is needed but continued resources to fund the staff and operations are needed.
5. Parenting Assistance, including, but not limited to, parenting skills classes offered on weekends, medical insurance for children, payroll deductions to cover ER visits.
6. The Community Planning Committee recognizes the different needs between rural and urban areas and understands what works for an urban area does not necessarily work for rural areas. Gaps in resources exist when those differing needs are not recognized and addressed through funding opportunities.

V. HOMELAND SECURITY

A. Issues

1. The Federal government is the only agency that can overcome this deficiency.
2. Homeland security-related equipment could serve double duty as hazard mitigation, containment, and response resources.
3. A response to terrorism or the task of protecting our homeland must be carried out at all levels of government. Traditionally, we have relied on the Federal government to respond to threats against our country, because the threats have come about as a result of actions of foreign governments. The response to and education regarding the violent actions of terrorist cells cannot be assigned to one specific government; therefore, our response to it must come from all levels of the American government. Simply stated, we are not adequately prepared at the local level to handle this type of threat.

B. Resources

1. Other than funding resources from the Federal government and the State of Texas, there are no local funds available to accomplish the local homeland security-related goals and objectives. Funding to address homeland security must be directed toward enabling local authorities to respond to threats on a local level with support from State and Federal agencies. This funding should be directed toward the acquisition of equipment to provide adequate warning to the public, enable efficient communications between agencies, identify potential threats, and train in all of these areas.
2. Homeland Security training is available at the local level at West Central Texas Council of Governments, Cisco College, and Ranger College, if funding becomes available.

C. Gaps

1. More comprehensively available and utilized warning systems
2. Inadequate communication systems and IT support

3. More training
4. Increased sharing of information between jurisdictions
5. Although there have been increased efforts on the part of Federal agencies to share information with State and local agencies, a tremendous gap still exists about terrorist activity intelligence.
6. Early warning systems, GIS mapping capabilities, communications equipment, and emergency management training on the level that would enable local agencies to protect our vital resources, including power and water supplies.

EASTLAND COUNTY COMMUNITY PLAN GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Enhance communications capabilities for law enforcement organizations throughout the county by providing systems that will enable inter-jurisdictional information sharing and enhance officer safety.
2. Increase coordinated law enforcement, mental health, and other entity services.
3. Enhance awareness and prevention of services to victims of domestic violence, dating violence, child abuse, sex and labor trafficking, stalking, and sexual assault.
4. Continue regular meetings of county-wide law enforcement representatives.
5. Continue to improve citizen notification systems.
6. Enhance awareness, prevention, and education programs to decrease instances of domestic violence and sexual assault.
7. Provide regional and local training for law enforcement.
8. Increase community service projects.
9. Provide training and peer leadership programs in schools.
10. Continue the Consequences program for 5th-8th graders in Eastland County.
11. Continue to provide local counseling for victims.
12. Provide training for store clerks on tobacco-related laws.
13. Continue drug awareness programs.
14. Enhance and continue School Health Advisory Councils.
15. Continue community service requirements for high school graduation.
16. Travel expenses for victims to obtain counseling
17. Improve sex offender accountability during community events.
18. Offer free or reduced-cost legal aid for access to courts.
19. Contact representatives about funding and distribution of available funds.
 - a. Recent federal funding for these gaps has increased; however, matching funds are required, and when the funding awards increase, so does the match requirement. The area's recent economic status has limited obtaining matching funds that are for grant-allowed activities. Several entity representatives present at the planning meeting stated that more funds could be requested and utilized to help our community if the match requirement is dropped.
 - b. Urban vs. Rural allocations were out of balance due to low reporting rates in rural areas.
 - c. Advocates at rape crisis centers provide the nation's frontline response to sexual assault at no cost to victims: meeting victims at emergency rooms at all hours; answering 24-hour hotlines; providing crisis intervention; running support groups for both recent victims and survivors of childhood abuse; mentoring volunteers; and providing awareness and prevention programs to their communities. Victims

receiving services at no cost to them is of utmost importance to avoid adding the economic hardships of paying for advocacy, support, and services on top of victimization. Child Advocacy Center service funds were increased to allow for forensic interviews through VOCA, which is helping increase services, but the need for rural SANE programs is ongoing, and the programs often take multiple years to establish and implement. Victims' legal needs stemming from the victimization create a need for advocate-trained attorney services. Ongoing full funding is needed for both Eastland County SANE nurses and a local attorney (who is trained in the dynamics of family violence, sexual assault, and child abuse) providing free legal services to victims.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

The issues and gaps identified herein are by no means the only problems facing Eastland County, but they are problems that affect the lives of most citizens in our area. And the issues, gaps, and resources discussed in this report match the initiatives set forth by Texas Governor, Greg Abbott regarding Economic Opportunity, Elevating Education, Ensuring Public Safety, and Envisioning a Stronger Tomorrow.

Implementing some of the recommendations of the Group will necessitate the expenditure of funds that, at present, are not available to or lacking for the community.

Discussions were held regarding improving collaboration and involving more entities, agencies, businesses, and community members to improve overall community health, education, and wellness.

Victim services in particular were discussed and the continued need to provide services to victims and their families. Discussed the continued need for mental health officer responses to meet the needs of traumatized persons. Eastland County Criminal District Attorney's office provided the following statistics:

Offense Type	2021	2022	2023	2024
Misd Family Violence	15	32	35	45
Felony Family Violence	7	17	28	29
Sexual Offense - Child	11	19	7	20
Sexual Offense - Adult	5	14	5	4
Injury to Child	6	10	4	3

Eastland Police Department reported from January through December of 2021: 13 family violence-related calls; 7 sexual assault of a child related calls; and 5 sexual assault adult calls.

Eastland County Crisis Center reports:

(DV- Domestic Violence; SA – Sexual Assault; CSA- Child Sexual Assault; PA – Physical Abuse; Dual – Both Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence)

Jan. – Dec. 2021

Total New Victims: 137 (47 CVAC + 90 CAC)

- Victimization of New Clients

- o DV: 35
- o SA/CSA: 57
- o PA: 20
- o Dual DV/SA: 11
- o Other: 43

Total Clients Served: 347 (190 CVAC + 157 CAC)

Jan. – Dec. 2022

Total New Victims: 143 (55 CVAC + 88 CAC)

- Victimizations of New Clients
 - o DV: 47
 - o SA/CSA: 72
 - o PA: 6
 - o Dual DV/SA: 13
 - o Other: 46

Total Clients Served: 340 (164 CVAC + 176 CAC)

Jan. – Dec. 2023

Total New Victims: 126 (57 CVAC + 69 CAC)

- Victimizations of New Clients
 - o DV: 46
 - o SA/CSA: 51
 - o PA: 11
 - o Dual DV/SA: 17
 - o Other: 12

Total Clients Served: 352 (171 CVAC + 181 CAC)

Jan. – Dec. 2024

Total New Victims: 97 (38 CVAC + 59 CAC)

- Victimizations of New Clients
 - o DV: 22
 - o SA/CSA: 36
 - o PA: 3
 - o Dual DV/SA: 17
 - o Other: 25

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A clear understanding of the responsibilities, expectations, and perceptions of each the entity involved can greatly enhance individual and collective productivity, but this can occur only with widespread participation in this plan so that all entities are aware of the problems and resources. Agreed upon by all present was the need to provide well-trained personnel and keep skilled employees, which requires competitive salaries and benefits packages. Also agreed upon was the need for program funding, such as the costs of integrated technology and services to support the employees in performing their duties for the community.

The Group agreed on the continued need for financial stability of the emergency services within the county, especially the fire and EMS services. These concerns have been at least partially addressed through increased funding from the County for firefighting services, and municipalities are looking for options to update the aging water infrastructures. This problem impacts the economy and directly affects the quality of life in Eastland County.

Finally, the Group agrees Eastland County has an amazing community with entities dedicated to improving services and meeting the needs of its residents; however, the lack of resources to meet the needs noted above causes some concerns for the future development and safety of the county population. Gaps can be decreased and more people can be helped with additional and/or continued funding.

(End)