



Our Path Forward:  
A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH AND PUBLIC SAFETY  
5 Year Strategic Plan 2023 - 2028

December 18, 2023 (REV)





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## *Strategic Planning Partners & Retreat Attendees*

Commissioner Doreen Williams Rockdale County Commissioner, Post II	Mary-Lou M. Snow, Project Manager Restorative Justice Complex, Rockdale County
Hon. Nancy Bills Judge, Rockdale Superior Court	Shawonna Gaither Accountability Courts
Leroy Bryan Opening Doors to Recovery	Deedra Golston Constituent Services, Liaison, Rockdale County
Hon. Robert F. Mumford Chief Judge, Rockdale Superior Court	Chief R. Scott Freeman, Ph.D. Conyers Police Department
Thomas Cain Opening Doors to Recovery	Karen James Community Family Partner
Teresa Carmichael View Point Health	Deputy Chief Kim Lucas Conyers Police Department
Bill Carruthers Stepping Up Initiative/Grit & Grace	Captain Dennis Pass Rockdale County Sheriff's Office (RCSO)
Tanisha Character Stepping Up Initiative/Grit & Grace	Travis Rucker DCS, Felony Probation/Parole
Tanisha Cooley Naphcare/Rockdale County Sheriff's Office (RCSO)	Michelle Sawyer Rockdale District Attorney's Office
Brenda Ernest Stepping Up Initiative	Elizabeth Smith Rockdale Juvenile Court
Mona Franklin Rockdale Coalition for Children and Family	Lieutenant Susan Watkins Rockdale County Sheriff's Office (RCSO)
Dr. Brenda Wagenknecht-Ivey CEO, PRAXIS Consulting, Inc.	Kenyetta Wilson Naphcare/Rockdale County Sheriff's Office (RCSO)
Tara Kunkel Executive Director, Rulo Strategies	<i>Strategic planning began March 2022 and ended June 2023. Retreat held on 2/1/23.</i>

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## **2023 – 2028 Strategic Plan**

### ***Our Path Forward: A Holistic Approach to Mental Health and Public Safety***

#### **Section 1: Overview**

The purpose of this document is to develop a comprehensive plan to implement collaborative programs that target individuals and promote public safety and public health for people with mental illness (MI) and co-occurring mental illness and substance abuse (CMISA) entering or involved in the justice system.

Behavioral health and justice system leaders in Rockdale County have been working diligently for several years to improve services to justice involved people with mental health issues and co-occurring disorders. In 2015, the County Board of Commissioners, in collaboration with and the support of the Rockdale County Sheriff's Office (RCSO), passed a resolution to (1) bring together system leaders to facilitate change and improvements; (2) examine treatment and service capacity; and (3) implement solutions to reduce the number of people with mental health issues in the county jail.

The "Stepping Up" Resolution prompted the formation of an Executive Committee and other committees to develop recommendations in the following areas: (1) criminal justice system and behavioral health data; (2) jail diversion; (3) process analysis; (4) policy and memorandum of understanding; (5) facility; and (6) programs. The "Stepping Up" Initiative has program staff including those with lived experiences and is led by a Steering Committee comprised of behavioral health and justice system partners, stakeholders, and leaders.

Additional efforts to improve services in Rockdale County have included:

1. Engaging in outreach to the community between 2016 – 2018, which included sponsoring a series of mental health forums and community conversations on pertinent topics such as mental health and suicide awareness.
2. Implementing diversion programs (e.g., Accountability Courts) and formed a mental health collaborative with Conyers Police Department (2021).
3. Strengthening the specialty / problem solving Courts (Accountability Courts) including Family Treatment Court, DUI Court, Adult Felony Drug Court, and Resource (Mental Health) Court.
4. Participated in Sequential Intercept Mapping (SIM) in 2020 with assistance from the Carl Vison Institute of Government at the University of Georgia. The SIM mapping identified 5 priority areas, which were: (1) knowledge of community resources; (2) mobile response vs. law enforcement response; (3) assessment fees; (4) data collection and sharing; and (5) jail treatment services.
5. Completed the Stepping Up Assessment Tool, which further helped to identify needs/gaps in services.
6. Entered into an agreement in 2022 with NaphCare to specifically use Coordify and TechCare Go Crisis Response Software Systems to support Stepping Up initiatives.

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7. Expanded partnerships with treatment providers such as View Point Health (Community Service Board) and Naphcare (RCSO Medical Provider). A strong partnership also exists with Grit & Grace, A Recovery Community Organization (Addiction Recovery Support Center).
  8. Implemented the Opening Doors to Recovery program in 2022 which uses a three-person team to provide intensive case management for those coming out of jail.
  9. Purchased a building that will be future sight for a 24/7/365 crisis diversion center.

In 2022, Rockdale County's Stepping Up Initiative applied for and received a grant from the *Convening County, Court, and Justice Leaders: A Framework for Cross-System Collaboration Initiative*, funded by the State Justice Institute. The grant was aimed at helping jurisdictions with a commitment to working together to achieve better outcomes, improve justice system performance, and improve public safety.

Thus, in 2022 and early 2023, Stepping Up participated in a strategic planning process facilitated by Rulo Strategies and PRAXIS Consulting, Inc. The strategic planning process included:

1. Analyzing internal and external trends data / information. (See Appendix A for a summary).
2. Reviewing the results of community engagement surveys conducted in the fall of 2022. (See Appendix B for a summary).
3. Exploring future opportunities. (See Appendix C for a summary).
4. Identifying strategic goals and improvement strategies at a strategic planning retreat with the Stepping Up Steering Committee on Feb. 1, 2023.

The strategic goals and improvement strategies developed by the Steering Committee are presented below. Also included below are the Rockdale County's Stepping Up 2023-2024 improvement priorities.



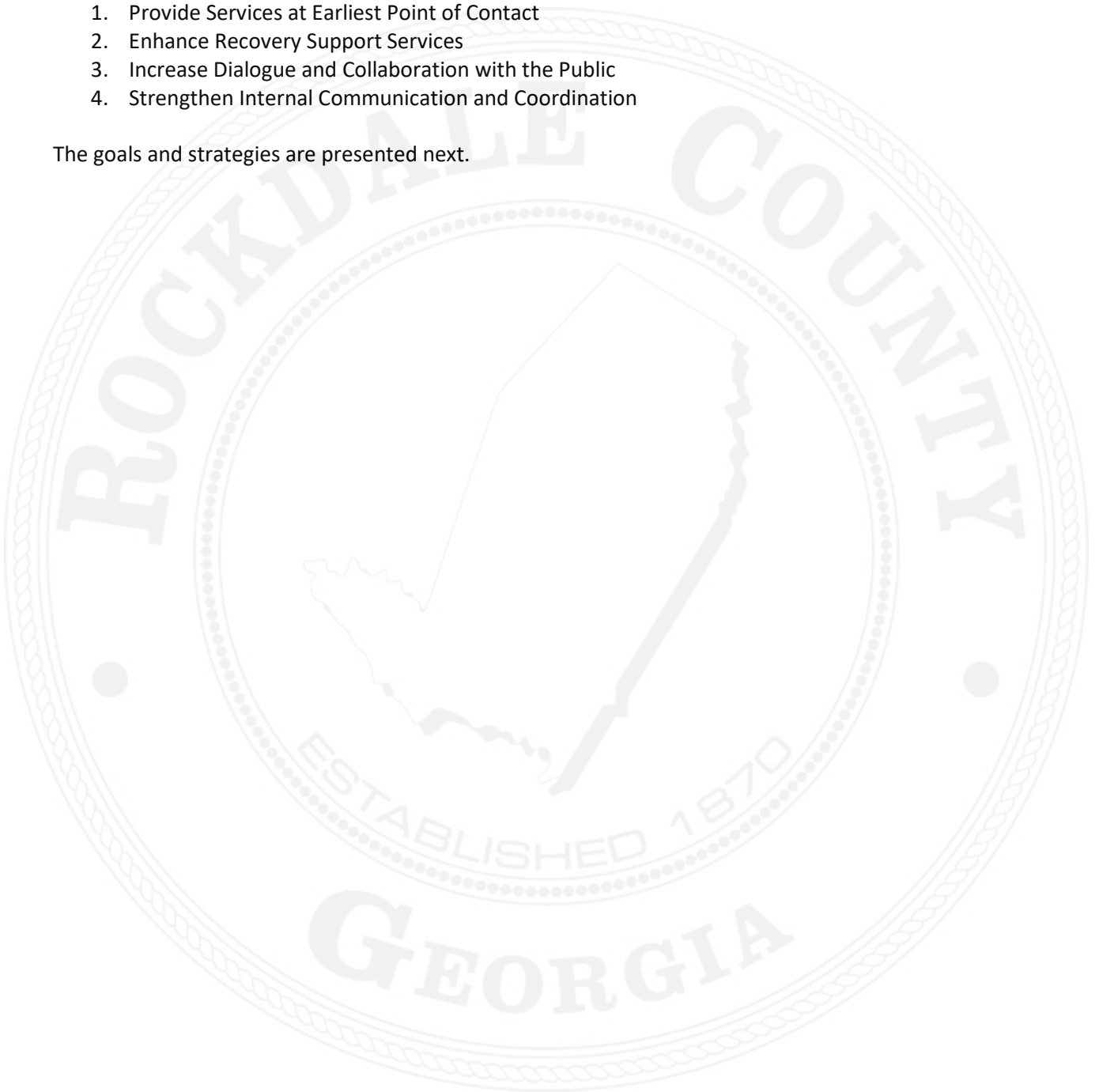
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## Section 2: Strategic Goals and Strategies

The Stepping-Up Steering Committee agreed on four strategic goals and developed strategies to achieve them. The four strategic goals are:

1. Provide Services at Earliest Point of Contact
2. Enhance Recovery Support Services
3. Increase Dialogue and Collaboration with the Public
4. Strengthen Internal Communication and Coordination

The goals and strategies are presented next.



## STRATEGIC GOAL 1:

### Provide Services at Earliest Point of Contact

Strategic Goal 1: Provide Services at Earliest Point of Contact	
1. Connect people with appropriate services / programs at the earliest point of contact within the justice system.	<p>Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Add / strengthen services at Intercept 0 - before arrest/entry to the CJ system.</li> <li>b. Strengthen co-responder response for CPD and RCSO</li> <li>c. Evaluate and implement effective strategies for transporting individuals experiencing a mental health crisis.</li> <li>d. Provide services earlier to individuals in jail.</li> <li>e. Continue to enhance / expand jail programming (e.g., open mental health unit).</li> <li>f. Develop a pretrial diversion program / pre-trial supervision for people with mental health needs.</li> <li>g. Expand the DUI Court to more clients who have co-occurring mental health needs.</li> <li>h. Compile and share information across agencies (e.g., create a directory of information).</li> <li>i. Strengthen assessment services (e.g., juveniles; individuals involved in family treatment court) / use standardized screening.</li> <li>j. Build relationships/connections/coordination across agencies to enhance services.</li> </ul>

2023 – 2026 Priority Initiatives		
Strategic Initiatives	Lead Person	Group/Agency
1. Mental Health Unit in Jail: Open / Provide Mental Health Services to Individuals in Jail	Captain Pass And Erman Gunindi	Sheriff's Office
2. Pre-Arrest Diversion: Improve Pre-Arrest Diversion and Co-Responder Model – Develop the process and procedures for making decisions about diversion (i.e., develop criteria, decision tree, identify decision makers, develop a fidelity model, etc.)	Mary Lou Snow Brenda Ernest Derek Marchman	Stepping Up Initiative Magistrate Court District Attorney's Office Public Defender's Office Chief Judge, Superior Court Probation/Supervision
3. Restorative Justice Complex (RJC)	Mary-Lou M. Snow Michael Robinson Chad Jones	Stepping Up Initiative General Services



## STRATEGIC GOAL 2:

### Enhance Recovery Support Services

Strategic Goal 2: Enhance Recovery Support	
2. Increase access to recovery support (e.g., housing, employment, transportation, peer support).	<p>Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Expand affordable housing and transportation opportunities and options in the County.</li> <li>b. Build relationships and partner with the housing authority and other community partners.</li> <li>c. Explore public/private partnerships in creating transitional housing.</li> <li>d. Compile and educate / share information about available resources (e.g., jobs, housing, etc.).</li> <li>e. Identify and build partnerships with employers who will hire justice involved individuals.</li> <li>f. Communicate agency needs and collaborate across justice agencies to meet needs/provide resources (e.g., van for transportation).</li> <li>g. Explore / pursue partnership with existing transportation providers (UBER, LYFT) for transportation assistance and services.</li> <li>h. Develop responses that will build trust and treat all people with dignity and respect.</li> <li>i. Develop options / expand services for individuals involved in civil matters (vs. criminal).</li> </ul>

2023 – 2027 Priority Initiatives		
Strategic Initiatives	Lead Person	Group/Agency
4. Housing Improvements: Complete and Take Action on Comprehensive Land Use Update	Commissioner Washington Commissioner Williams	Planning Department Board of Commissioners
5. Funding Opportunities: Explore and Secure Available Funding & Expand Housing Partnerships	Mary Lou Snow Brenda Ernest Chad Jones	Board of Commissioners Stepping Up Initiative View Point Health Department of Community Affairs Magistrate Court
6. Transportation Improvements: Complete Transportation Survey, Expand Partnerships, Implement Changes	Commissioner Williams Deedra Golston	Board of Commissioners Transportation Dept. Grit and Grace
7. Workforce Development Improvements: Build Partnerships with Employers, Pursue Funding for Programs, etc.	Commissioner Washington Brenda Ernest	Board of Commissioners Stepping Up Initiative Conyers - Rockdale Economic Council

### STRATEGIC GOAL 3:

#### Increase Dialogue and Collaboration with the Public

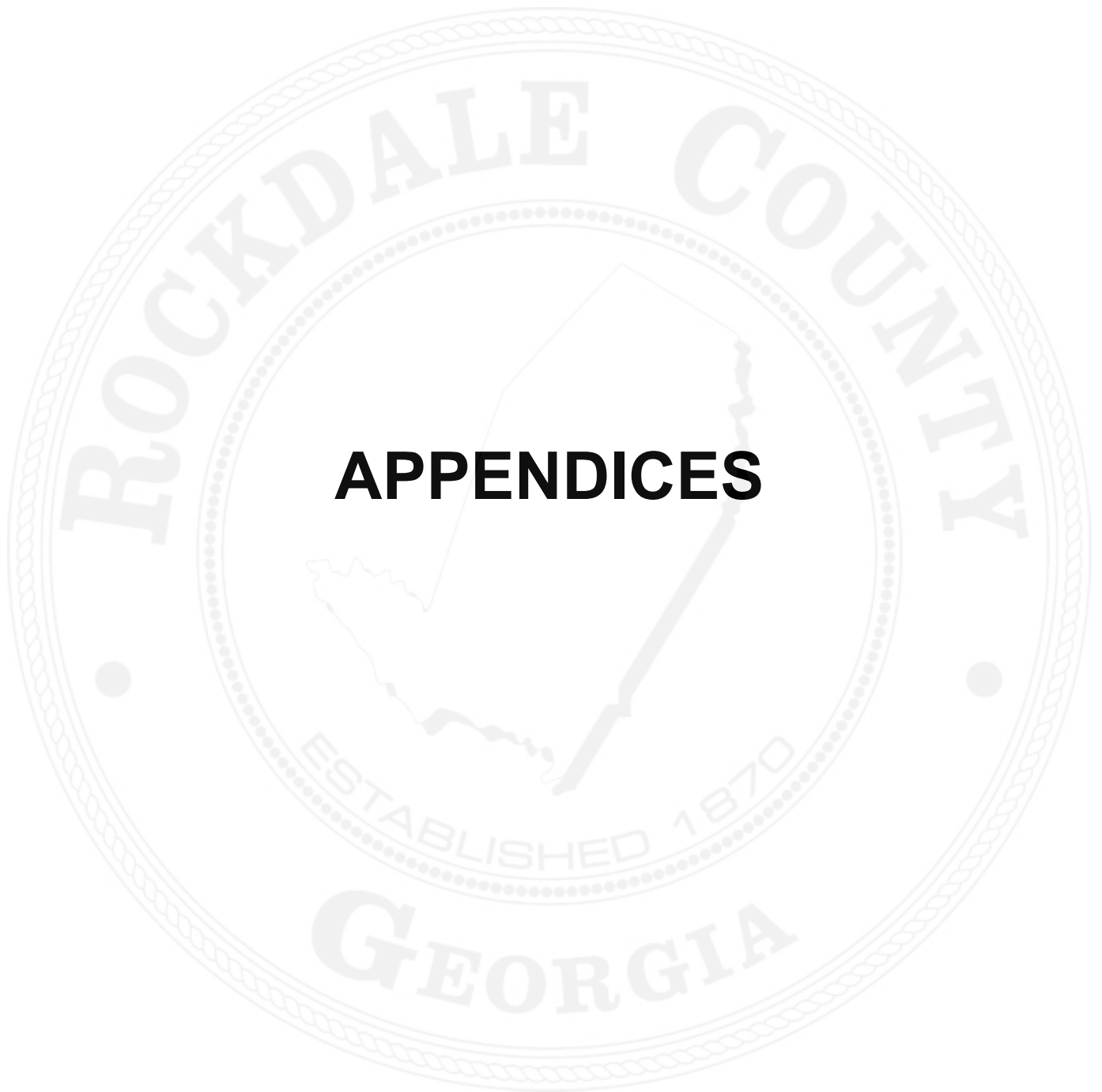
Strategic Goal 3: Increase Dialogue and Collaboration with the Public	
3. Increase dialogue, trust-building, and partnerships among law enforcement, justice partners, community groups, families, and individuals with lived experiences.	<p>Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Continue dialogue / participate in radio shows (Stepping Up Initiative Program) - share information about the system, programs, services.</li> <li>b. Expose partners to the intricacies of accessing peer support (how to get into / access).</li> <li>c. build partnerships with housing partners.</li> <li>d. Educate / share information with community (e.g., faith-based organizations, nonprofits, chamber of commerce, etc.)</li> <li>e. Build support in the community (e.g., emergency housing, transitional housing, etc.)</li> <li>f. Include individuals/family members with lived experiences at the table; identify navigator specialists/mentors/peer support - people to walk along with you.</li> <li>g. Encourage courageous conversations through focus groups - open/honest dialogue (community members - put it all on the table; set goals; make decisions, etc.); be respectful of all.</li> <li>h. Develop collective, collaborative messaging to educate and inform; develop a powerful, consistent message; Develop Communication Plan/ Reduce Stigma campaign.</li> <li>i. Identify and address racial disparities; work on equity for all.</li> <li>j. Structured dialogue / social gatherings - attended by all system leaders; develops mutual appreciation and builds trust.</li> <li>k. take messages to the schools - parents / family members / caretakers to prevent involvement in the CJ system (town hall meetings w/justice partners, parent meetings, DPI+R, Rockdale Coalition, etc.)</li> <li>l. Partner with Channel 23 to get messages out to the community.</li> <li>m.</li> </ul>

2023 – 2026 Priority Initiatives		
Strategic Initiatives	Lead Person	Group/Agency
8. Communication Plan: Develop/Implement Comprehensive Communication Plan Might include community forum, use Channel 23, use county's social media platforms/sites, DPI+R, etc.	Tanisha Character	Stepping Up Initiative Public Relations Department

**STRATEGIC GOAL 4:**  
**Strengthen Internal Communication and Coordination**

<b>Strategic Goal 4: Strengthen Internal Communication and Coordination</b>	
4. Strengthen internal communication and coordination across justice and behavioral health agencies to ensure efficient knowledge of resources.	<p>Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Share information across agencies / partners - e.g., share recovery curriculum, etc.; educate each other about programs/needs; strengthen connections among agency leaders.</li> <li>b. Conduct regular round tables - e.g., every other month; have dialogue/ listen, learn, and grow; use technology to connect regularly.</li> </ul>

<b>2023 – 2026 Priority Initiatives</b>		
<b>Strategic Initiatives</b>	<b>Lead Person</b>	<b>Group/Agency</b>
9. Steering Committee Meetings: Meet Regularly, Share Information, Coordinate Services, Bring in New Partners; Make Information Easily Accessible, etc.	Commissioner Williams Mary-Lou Snow Brenda Ernest	SUI Executive Team
10. New County Office: Form a new County Office with Staff Person to Coordinate a <b>Holistic Approach to Mental Health &amp; Public Safety</b> in Rockdale County	Commissioner Williams Deedra Golston	County Leadership Board of Commissioners Finance



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## APPENDIX A

### Trends Analysis

External trends analyzed included: social/demographic, economic, policy/political, technological, and national justice system trends. Crime, Accountability Courts, Stepping-Up Program, Jail, and an inventory of current providers were among the internal trend's data / information analyzed.

The trends analysis revealed a multitude of short and long-term implications for the behavioral health and justice systems in Rockdale County. A summary is provided below in Table. 1.

**Table 1 - Implications of External Trends on the System**

1. Crime Rates: The system must continue to address/work to reduce crime rates due to increasing population, increasing gun violence, younger people / youth committing crimes. Law enforcement and system partners must continually work to decrease recidivism and be proactive in identifying threats.
2. Services: There is a need to fill gaps in / augment programs and services. The County needs a complete continuum of services (e.g., diversion, reentry, housing, workforce development and training, employment) to address needs.
3. Equal Access to Services: The County must ensure equal access for all people, and especially people in traditionally marginalized groups (e.g., LGBTQ++, those with no health insurance, low income, non-English speaking; people of different races and ethnicities).
4. Economic Uncertainty: Recognize rising inflation/costs; the County must address rising poverty rates.
5. Technology: Continue to invest in technology. The County / all partners must stay abreast of technological advances, provide virtual access and services, and reduce the digital divide.
6. Collaboration: The County must continue to increase / foster collaboration among community, behavioral health, and justice system agencies/providers (e.g., law enforcement and schools, etc.)
7. Education and Awareness: More public education is needed to increase understanding / awareness. All must improve / target messages and share accurate information.
8. Agility and Responsiveness: All organizations need to build an agile, responsive system able to respond to changing needs / circumstances.

Link to External Trends Summary

<https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:1c3d360d-92df-3925-90d4-27263c59c2f3>

Link to Internal Trends Summary

<https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:b600e696-85af-3f3a-aaf5-ad49f9347484>



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## APPENDIX B

### Summary - Community Engagement Surveys

Members of the Stepping Up Initiative Steering Committee, community and justice system partners, and individuals involved in the justice system were surveyed in September – October 2022. The information gathered from the surveys was used to inform the strategic planning process. A full report of the engagement survey results can be accessed here [link to summary report].

Below is a summary of themes from the surveys.

#### Summary of Themes from your Partners:

- **Mental health needs** are more prevalent and more complex.
- The number of **unhoused** individuals is growing. There is a need for **housing**.
- Increase in the number of **youth involved in serious crime**.
- Increased need for **community services to support youth**.
- Growing need for **transportation**.
- **The available workforce** is declining.
- Availability of **treatment options** is declining.
- The **economy** is declining.
- The impact and collateral consequences of the pandemic continue to be felt.
- Racial disparities persist. Continue diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

#### Summary of Themes from Those with Lived Experience:

##### Employment:

- *I am doing well, but I was lucky enough to have a job. I have family support and education that helps me. Perhaps provide more employers willing to employ those on probation in at least a limited capacity.*
- *All in all, the process has worked well for me, but I have a very understanding employer. It would be great if more employers would consider hiring people on probation. Maybe some kind of incentive would help? The inability to get a job makes for a vicious cycle.*

##### Housing:

- *Stable housing has been my biggest challenge. I have to get stable housing so that I can gain custody. Being a felon has been a challenge to get housing for us.*

#### Account for the Challenges/Encourage:

- *See me earlier in the day since I work at night. I am trying to get some sleep for work, so when you all come late at night, it throws my sleep off.*
- *Understand I am human, and [I am] trying to live with what I have.*
- *Practice what you preach. Do what you say. Don't spank a child, and then turn around and give them a lollipop. Be consistent. Most of all, set an example. Be "the" example. Share respect and allow those around you to admire and respect you.*



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## APPENDIX C

### Strategic Planning Retreat

The Stepping-Up Steering Committee gathered at the Costley Mill Event Center on February 1, 2023, for a day-long strategic planning retreat. Developing a strategic plan for improving and expanding services to justice-involved individuals with behavioral health needs was the focus of the retreat.

Attendees shared the following opportunities for improvement at the beginning of the retreat.

#### Future Opportunities – Areas for Improvement

##### Programs / Services:

1. Continue to strengthen the co-responder program in city and county (City police - in place for 2 years)
2. Implement pre-trial diversion for people with mental health needs
3. A way to mentor people when out on bail/bond
4. Open mental health unit in the jail (in progress)
5. Get people into accountability courts quicker.
6. Alcohol related behaviors to DUI court.
7. Close gap for those coming in for treatment - better records / information sharing to continue treatment (connect individuals to treatment / meds in jail)
8. Bridge medications upon release. Sliding scale.
9. Expand housing for justice involved individuals w/behavioral health needs
10. Housing partners who understand behavioral health
11. Have a place where people can go so, they don't return to "old places"
12. Transportation at every juncture
13. Workforce development/build a new way of life
14. Focus on recovery - mental wellness; path to mental well-ness; what to do next; teach transition to being good citizen; open the door/path to recovery
15. Better tracking of where people are to avoid issuing warrants
16. Incorporate people with lived experiences
17. More resources to meet needs

### Training/Development

18. Ensure law enforcement officers/deputies are trained – e.g., de-escalation tactics to divert people from the criminal justice system; Keep people in a mental health crisis out of jail – offer treatment to stop repetitive arrests
19. Ensure training is being applied in the field. Officers will practice integrity and hold each other accountable to training tactics.

### Communication, Connections, and Partnerships

20. Communicate better about what we already have or what is already in place.
21. Engage family members in the process.
22. Get peer support/people with lived experienced to partner at all steps of intercept
23. Strengthen partnership between community partners/agencies/systems
24. Review practices and policies – address stigma
25. Think “To Thine Own Self Be True” in everything we do. This phrase has a multiplicity of meanings. The 1<sup>st</sup> meaning is that someone can better judge himself if he has done what he should or could have done. The 2<sup>nd</sup> meaning is that one must be honest in his ways and relations. The 3<sup>rd</sup> meaning is that one must always do the right thing.
26. Sub groups will meet 2-4 times per year for check ins. **Beginning Jan 2024.**
27. Collectively, 1 x per year, all persons will meet to discuss progress – praise accomplishments and work through and problem solve deficits. **Beginning April 2024.**