

THROUGH “Texas Families: Together and Safe,” PRS provides funding to Project Unity in Bryan. A comprehensive community initiative, Project Unity helps families in crisis get the resources and services they need. One of the program’s major goals is to help families before abuse or neglect occurs. The program also helps families become self-sufficient.

“I was living in government housing when Project Unity moved to the neighborhood,” said Veronica B., a mother of three who has benefited from the program. “Originally, I signed up as a volunteer, but as it turned out I was one of the people who needed their help. Project Unity gave us a place to go to get out of the heat, a safe place for the children to play. They helped us with so many things—to get a job and get off public assistance, to get my daughter into Head Start, to get my son a mentor to help him in school, to give me the opportunity to go to college, to get into counseling when my husband passed away, and to help me to learn how to restore my credit so that I could qualify for a loan to buy a home.” Today, Veronica helps spread the word about Project Unity.

Intervention and Responsiveness

OUR AGENCY is often associated with investigative and regulatory programs that serve and protect vulnerable Texans. However, PRS places a great deal of emphasis on services and projects that increase efficiency, respond to citizens' concerns, involve community initiative and innovation, and treat the problems that may lead to abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

**Automation:
The Child and
Adult Protective System (CAPS)**

Just a few years ago, child and adult protective services workers had to rely on an antiquated system of information storage and retrieval. Because it was

cumbersome and unreliable, the system often hampered workers' ability to gather complete and accurate information needed to make the best possible decisions for their clients.

In the fall of 1996, the agency implemented the new automation system called CAPS (Child and Adult Protective System). Now, PRS staff are able to electronically store and immediately transfer vital child and adult protective casework information, from the initial report all the way through the final case result.

CAPS, which represents the biggest change for staff in Fiscal Year 1997, also improves the way PRS can interface with other agencies and protective services systems. It has enabled the agency to improve services to foster

parents, group homes, and other service providers and to provide timely information to oversight entities.

Resolving Complaints:

The Ombudsman's Office

PRS listens to the clients we serve, to the people whose lives we affect. When people feel they have not been treated fairly by the agency, they may resolve their case-specific complaints through the PRS Ombudsman Office. The Ombudsman provides an impartial review of cases in which there has been a complaint to determine whether the agency's policies have been followed properly. If the complaint is determined valid, the Ombudsman recommends corrective action. PRS has made a concentrated effort to make this resource more widely known. During Fiscal Year 1997, the Ombudsman's Office received 3,633 phone calls on their toll-free complaint line, 1-800-720-7777, a 13 percent increase over the previous year.

The Ombudsman's Office held a pilot program during Fiscal Year 1997 in Corpus Christi to help improve the tracking and resolution of complaints. The agency plans to fully implement the program on a statewide basis in Fiscal Years 1998-99.

Abuse Hotline

Before PRS became an agency in 1992, the way in which incoming telephone calls regarding abuse, neglect, and exploitation of vulnerable Texans were handled varied from region to region. Since then, the agency has built up its centralized hotline—also known as Statewide Intake — with plans to receive all calls there by Fiscal Year 1999.

During Fiscal Year 1997, the Abuse Hotline handled 510,833 calls. It began to handle all APS facility-based calls and took on two more regions of the

state for community-based APS investigations. In the first half of 1997, the hotline began taking half of all after-hour calls (nights and weekends) for the entire state. By the end of 1998, all after-hour calls will go to the hotline.

Texas Runaway Hotline

PRS operates the 24-hour, toll-free Texas Runaway Hotline (1-888-580-HELP). The Hotline, which includes a workforce of about 60 volunteers, offers crisis intervention, counseling services, and information and referral to youths and families. During Fiscal Year 1997, the program increased public awareness through television, radio, and other media. Outreach efforts included billboard space provided by the Donald D. Hammill Foundation, grocery bag messages provided by Randall's and Tom Thumb, and public transportation placards in Dallas, El Paso, Fort Worth, Lubbock, and San Antonio. The number



PRS Hotlines

Texas Abuse Hotline	1-800-252-5400
Foster Care and Adoption Inquiry Line	1-800-233-3405
Child Care Information	1-800-862-5252
Ombudsman Hotline	1-800-720-7777
Runaway Hotline	1-888-580-HELP
Reports in MHMR Facilities	1-800-647-7418

of calls received by the Runaway Hotline increased to 35,663, a rise from 30,860 received in the previous year.

Preventing Juvenile Delinquency: The STAR program

The Services to At-Risk Youth (STAR) program serves young people at risk of delinquent or criminal behavior. Through contracts with community agencies, STAR offers crisis intervention, parent training, mentor services, and counseling to youths who are having difficulty at home, have had a brush with the law, or have run away. Although these children don't fit the categories traditionally served by social service and juvenile probation agencies, early intervention is critical to help them resolve their problems before they turn to violent or delinquent behavior. Although the program was originally designed to serve runaways and truants, STAR was enlarged in 1995 to include children ages 7-17 who have

committed certain types of juvenile offenses. STAR services were expanded as well. Once limited to 55 counties, the program now offers services in 182 counties. Services are expected to be available in all 254 counties by 1999. In Fiscal Year 1997, STAR served 18,050 youths.

Preventing Child Abuse: Family Outreach, Project SECURE, and Crisis Nurseries

Family Outreach is a community-based program that helps families in times of stress. The program enlists volunteers to provide support, encouragement, and parenting information. The goal of the program is to prevent child abuse and neglect by strengthening troubled families. There are 31 Family Outreach centers throughout the state.

The agency worked with the Children's Trust Fund on Project Secure, a respite care program for families in Abilene that has had a significant effect on decreasing the rate of abuse and neglect. PRS also participated in the Crisis Nurseries project in Abilene, Amarillo, and Lubbock, which provides respite care to children who are at risk of abuse and neglect.

Family Support

In Fiscal Year 1997, PRS provided funding for 16 collaborative projects to provide health and child abuse prevention services

to high-risk families under the "Texas Families: Together and Safe" program. Projects were developed by coalitions of local providers and government agencies to meet the specific needs of their community. Each project is different, but all are designed to streamline access to services and focus on the whole family.

Community Youth Development Grants

PRS awarded grants totaling \$8.7 million to 11 targeted communities which design programs to reduce juvenile crime. The Community Youth Development program provides money for after-school and mentor programs, computer labs, alternative activities, parenting programs, and other projects in ZIP codes with the highest rates of juvenile crime in the state. In Fiscal Year 1997, grants were awarded to projects in Amarillo, Austin, Brownsville, Corpus Christi, Dallas, El Paso, Fort Worth, Galveston, Houston, McAllen, and San Antonio.

Community Youth Development Grant projects are collaborative efforts that bring together local agencies and businesses that historically may have not worked together. The Weed and Seed program is a partnership with the U.S. Attorney's Office in Brownsville, Corpus Christi, Galveston, Houston, and McAllen that is designed to "weed out" bad elements and "seed them" with positive influences. PRS also worked with the U.S. Department of Justice in the same cities to provide training, and technical assistance, and identify gaps in juvenile justice. ■