

Hamilton, Merrick & Nance

Comprehensive Youth Services Plan

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Section I: Executive Summary

In our discussions we have noted that mental health has had the largest impact on the issues we are all seeing. Many juveniles are dealing with mental health issues whether they are their own or the mental health of family members or even friends. Unsupervised phone and social media use is also impacting the lives of the juveniles we have in our communities. While there is some mental health help available for youths there is more needed. Services that are being utilized frequently are MST, SOS and regions 3 and 5. Teammates and Big Brothers/Big Sisters are also groups that assist with positive roles for younger youths in our communities. As a group we have discussed ways to educate the members of our communities with hopes of helping them to see the importance of these issues. We believe that presentations in the schools or at community meeting places

would be helpful and informative. If funds for these presentations are needed we can/will apply for grants from the Hamilton and Merrick foundations. We have an attorney who is willing to speak at school functions, both the Hamilton County Sheriff and Merrick County Sheriffs' office are willing to present on the dangers of social media and the reality of human trafficking. Adapting our presentation and education to what will benefit our communities will need to be a continually changing process.

Section II: Introduction

Community Team: Background, Formation, and Purpose

Description of Team: *The team was originally established in 2014 and met in person until the COVID-19 pandemic, when the team moved to meeting via Zoom. There were some staff changes that caused the meetings to be difficult to hold, however the team is aiming to get those back on track to meet quarterly, in person or online. We plan to continue to encourage participation from community stakeholders throughout the three counties to offer the best solutions for the juveniles and others in our communities.*

Description of the Planning Process: *The teams process is pretty straight forward. We work via email and also in person to discuss what we see happening with the juveniles in our communities. We brainstorm our thoughts as to what is contributing to the issues we see and follow up with things we believe could assist in alleviating said issues. When needed we are able to look at data from NCJIS or Census reports to see if what we are seeing is backed. Typically, everyone is able to participate in the meetings either in person or via email or a zoom type meeting. Based on what we see we feel like meeting at a minimum of quarterly is needed.*

List of Team Members/Contributors:

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Community Description

All three counties are similar in make-up and location. All counties are rural in nature and agriculture is the main industry; such as corn, hogs and cattle. Hamilton county houses several major employers that include: Aurora Cooperative, Hamilton Communications, IAMS Company, BonnaVilla, and Memorial Hospital. Major employers in Merrick county include: Platte Valley Fuel Ethanol, Bryan Health Merrick Medical, Central City Public Schools and Preferred Popcorn. Nance county houses several cattle feedlots, and a gravel and sand company. These counties have a low percentage of minority populations compared to Caucasian populations. All three counties have larger population areas surrounding them that include higher minority populations as well other employment opportunities. Aurora, Central City, and Fullerton house a larger population than the other communities located in the counties. There are school systems located in each county and Hamilton county houses other educational assets including the Edgerton Explorit Center, the Plainsmen Museum, and the L'Eglise Art center. These organizations provide learning opportunities through science, art, history and offer programs for youth participation. The rural location of the three counties does impede the opportunity to offer families treatment or aid to families needing it. That said, these counties have many people who are willing to get involved to attempt to find solutions to that and similar issues.

Hamilton county has a population of 9,537. The majority of the population is white or non-Hispanic at 93.4%, next is Hispanic at 4.3%, multiple or other races at 1.6%, Black is .6% and American Indian/Alaska Native and Asian/Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander are both at .4%. 24.9% of households have someone in the home with a Bachelor's degree while 28.9% have obtained a high school diploma. 98.6% of children ages 5-17 live above the poverty line, with 1.4% of 5-17 year olds and 1.8% of 18 and above live below it.

Merrick county also has a higher white population, with 95.8% of the 7,755 population reporting as such. 5.8% is Hispanic, .8% Black, 1.2% two or more races, American Indian and Alaskan Native, Asian both show as 1.0% and Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander report as 0.1%. The educational attainment shows 36.9% of households have at least a high school diploma, while 17.4% have a Bachelor's Degree. While 13.7% of people over 18 live in poverty and 8.7% live under the poverty line 91.3% of children 5-17 live above the poverty line.

Nance county is the smaller of the three counties showing a population of 3,274 again showing a higher white population a percentage of 93.5. 3.9% is the Hispanic population, Black is .6%, American Indian and Alaska Native .7%, Asian alone is .2% and two or more races 1.4%. 33.8% of households show someone has a high school diploma, and 19% have a Bachelor's Degree. 86.2% of children in the county live above the poverty line, while 13.8% of children aged 5-17 live below it. 12.9% of people 18 or over live in poverty.

Hamilton, Merrick and Nance county all have similar risk factors that may cause juveniles to enter the justice system. Such risk factors include family conflict, availability of alcohol or drugs, community instability, low community attachment, negative attitude towards school, family management problems and family conflict.

Section III: Youth Crime Analysis and Needs

All three counties have similar needs possibly due to their locations and similar makeups. Nance county does have a higher poverty rate in families while Hamilton has the lowest. All three counties work to get ahead of excessive absenteeism as it is an issue. The counties have a variety of ways they work to keep youths out of the justice system, including working with the Attendance Matters Program and Central Nebraska Youth Services to offer Diversion services as an alternative to going to court. The school systems offer an alternative education class to students who meet the requirements and struggle in regular classrooms. All three counties have shown that juveniles participate in the use of nicotine, marijuana, alcohol and misuse of prescription drugs at mostly higher rates than the Nebraska averages despite having a supportive adult in their lives.

Section IV: Services and Programs

Available Services: *There are several family services available in each county, although some services are difficult to extend due to location and need. If a family needs something the schools offer food programs and hold clothing drives, there are food pantries available through churches and Central Nebraska Community Action, and a food truck is also available once a month. For families struggling with attendance concerns Central Nebraska Youth Services and the Attendance Matters program works with the school district and the students' family to try to address and resolve barriers that make attending school difficult, at no cost. These communities are lucky to have available Sixpence, MST, Region 3 and 5, and SOS to work with families- not only one member of the family in the home. Hamilton county has a youth center and after school programs available at the Edgerton Explorit Center to try to keep youth in a pro-social setting. The three counties also host a variety of therapy providers- telehealth or in person- although it can be a struggle to be seen due to the sheer need.*

(includes programs that aim to intervene before and after problematic behaviors are identified)		
Program/ Agency Name	Eligible age	Risk or need
Churches	All ages	Low or no food, low income
<i>Sixpence</i>	0-3	premature birth and low child birth rate, teen parenthood, low levels of parental education, low family income and homes where English is spoken as a second language
<i>Central Nebraska Community Action Partnership</i>	0-99	mental health concerns, lack of parental warmth, socio economic assistance, low levels of parental education
<i>Attendance Matters</i>	5-18	youth and families that are at risk of becoming involved in the juvenile justice system due to chronic absenteeism
<i>Teammates</i>	9-18	low parental warmth
<i>Hamilton County Youth Center</i>		inappropriate use of time, drug and alcohol use, lack of supervision
<i>Aurora Leadership Center</i>	school aged	low parental warmth, inappropriate use of time, lack of supervision
<i>Edgerton Center After School Education Program</i>	elementary students	low parental warmth, inappropriate use of time, lack of supervision
<i>Central City Public Schools After School Program</i>	elementary students	low parental warmth, lack of supervision, inappropriate use of time
<i>Nebraska Extension-provides a number of educational programs and opportunities</i>	5-18	low parental warmth, lack of supervision, inappropriate use of time, mental health concerns
<i>Polk County Substance Abuse Coalition</i>	0-99	drug/alcohol abuse, mental health concerns
<i>Region 3 & 5 Health Systems</i>	0-99	Mental health concerns for individual or family, low parental warmth, poor family communication
<i>Central Nebraska Youth Services</i>	12-18	Provide alternatives for youth involved in the juvenile justice system

Juvenile Probation	Provide more intensive supervision and resources to juveniles and their families that have been entered into the juvenile justice system.
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Close Proximity Services: *As the counties are more rural in nature some needed services are found outside the area such as Grand Island, York and Columbus. Those locations are within an hour of the county seats. Child Advocacy Centers, shelters for women leaving domestic situations, business closets, and a larger variety of therapy providers. Mental health treatment facilities are not in the immediate area of the county seats but can be reached typically in under two hours when traveling to Kearney, Hastings or Lincoln.*

Detention and Alternatives to Detention: *There are no detention facilities in close proximity to Merrick, Nance or Hamilton counties. The closest detention facility is Northeast Nebraska Juvenile Services, which is located in Madison, NE which is an hour or more from our counties. Alternatives to detention that are utilized are typically electronic monitoring, community youth coaching, day and evening reporting and shelter care. There are no shelter care facilities in close proximity and when a youth is placed in one of these shelters it can be a difficult process to find one with availability.*

Needed Programs: *There is a need for more youth friendly activities and access in all of our counties. Hamilton, Merrick and Nance counties all have a type of fitness center but the cost is not something that all families can afford. Daycare is also a large need in all three counties with wait lists impeding the ability for some families to work and attend things they need to maintain their household. The lack of daycare and housing is also making it difficult for our communities to grow. The counties are also lacking shelters, local access to drug and alcohol treatment and local victim advocacy centers.*

Identified Need	Existing Program, Agency or Resource	Eligible age	Does this program accomplish the desired change? If no, what is missing?
Reduce the number of and provide alternatives for youth involved in the juvenile justice system.	Central Nebraska Youth Services	11-17 years	Yes, but continually altering the service delivery to target the needs of the juveniles in the community.
Reduce high percentages of absenteeism in school districts throughout the communities.	Attendance Matters	5-18 years	Yes, but continually altering the service delivery to target the needs of the juveniles and families in the community.
Parent engagement and parenting resources for families in our communities	Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services Central Nebraska Youth Services Sixpence	0-99	Central Nebraska Youth Services provides local resources to the families of the communities. Juvenile’s parents involved in the diversion

			program can access a parenting class if this is a need in assessments given or it is requested. The Department of Health & Human Services provides resources and support to families through voluntary non-court cases as well as court involved. Sixpence provides support and resources for families with children 0-5. The team would like to identify or provide more support to families in the communities in addition to these resources.
Local Mental Health Resources	Region 3 and Region 5 Merrick Medical Center	0-99	Region 3 provides emergent mental health resources for parents and families. There are not a lot of local community mental health providers or resources.

Coordination Plan

The team is lucky to be close enough in proximity that we can communicate quickly when something comes up, or if we are noticing new trends that need to be passed along to watch for. Several of the team members meet on a monthly or more basis and are able to discuss some of the issues that may arise between community team meetings. These communications can happen via email, phone conversation, email or however is deemed practical. As mentioned, the school systems have some form of alternative school system in place for the students needing placement outside of the typical classroom. This can look different for different scenarios, ranging from (but not limited to) in building alternative education classes, homebound and/or online classwork, or even day school alternatives. The schools also work within themselves and with Central Nebraska Youth Services and the Attendance Matters program to keep up with excessive absenteeism, and to attempt to keep youth out of the court systems. Central Nebraska Youth Services also offers juvenile diversion services, when the county attorney's feel that the youth cited may benefit from the program. This is also an important way to help teach and hold youth accountable while trying to keep them out of the court system for the citation

received. While there are several programs available to families who want to work together to receive counseling or family preservation services, they can be difficult to utilize as waiting periods, location and cost can be an issue. As the area grows services available may become more readily available, as well as shorter wait times. Our communities also offer different options for AA and NA, close or nearby if a person did not want to attend in their hometown. At this time we have not had to focus on putting together a system designed to reduce any disproportionate numbers of minority juveniles who are working within the juvenile justice system, as our communities do not have a large minority population.

Section V: Priorities and Strategies

Strategies	Action Steps	Responsible Party	Timeline	Resources Needed	Expected Results
1: Reduce the number of and provide alternatives for youth who find themselves in the justice system.	Work with juveniles cited with law violations to reduce the number of and provide alternatives in the juvenile justice system. Continually alter the service delivery to target the needs of the juveniles in the community.	Central Nebraska Youth Services, Pro-Social organizations	Continually	Pro-Social activities and access to for all ages of juveniles.	Spending more time in pro-social activities helps juveniles in making less risky choices.
2: Reduce the number of youths with excessive absenteeism.	Work with schools, families and juveniles to reduce high percentages of absenteeism in the school districts in our communities. Continually alter the service delivery to target the needs of the families and juveniles in the community.	Attendance Matters, Hamilton, Merrick and Nance School districts.	Continually	Continual access to resources families may need to assist the absence barriers many face.	Reduce the numbers of high absenteeism rates in our community.

<p>3: Offer and meet mental health needs earlier.</p>	<p>Assist families and individuals when needing resources for mental health. Provide emergent and regular mental health needs to help members of our community to maintain positive mental health.</p>	<p>Region 3 and 5, MST, Teammates, SixPence, SOS, Central Nebraska Youth Services, Merrick, Hamilton and Nance county school districts, Merrick Medical Center</p>	<p>Continually</p>	<p>Emergent care for youths under 13, transportation to stabilizing facilities, therapy providers specializing in juveniles.</p>	<p>With easy access and shorter wait lists to therapy providers we can expect to see an improvement in healthy coping mechanisms and overall mental health for those we all work with.</p>
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Appendix

A. Comprehensive Youth Services Plan Checklist

B. Memorandum of Understanding

C. Approval Letter/minutes from County Board

D. [Hamilton County data cp.pdf](#)

E. [Merrick County data cp.pdf](#)

F. [Nance County data cp.pdf](#)

G. 2023 County Data Sheets for Hamilton, and Nance

H. Nebraska Department of Education Data, Research, and
Evaluation

I. [CP checklist 2025+.pdf](#)

J. [Nance County.pdf](#)