



TEXAS CRIMINAL  
JUSTICE COALITION

## CREATING A SAFE CORRECTIONAL ENVIRONMENT FOR YOUTH AND STAFF

Safety and security threats within Texas' juvenile state secure facilities increase risks for both youth and staff, harm youth rehabilitation, and raise costs from staff turnover and injury

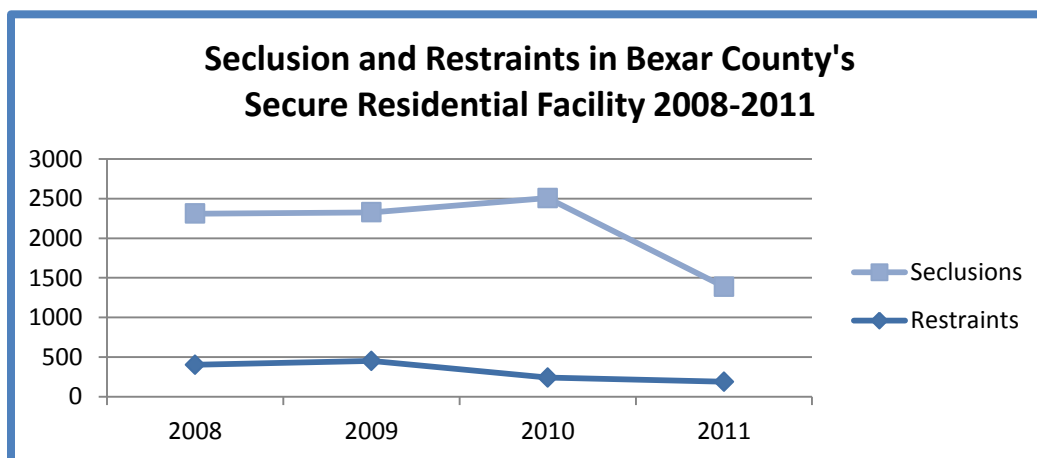
**RECOMMENDATION: Implement an evidence-based seclusion and restraint reduction strategy to improve the overall safety and security for both youth and staff** (e.g. the Bexar County Initiative).

The use of seclusions (sometimes referred to as solitary confinements) and restraints (sometimes referred to as use of force) poses serious challenges for secure juvenile facilities. While short “time outs” can be effective in certain circumstances, and while restraints are sometimes required to prevent injuries to youth or staff, use of day-long seclusions and overreliance on restraints are counterproductive.<sup>1</sup> Through the implementation of an evidence-based seclusion and restraint reduction strategy, stakeholders can ensure positive outcomes for youth and staff.

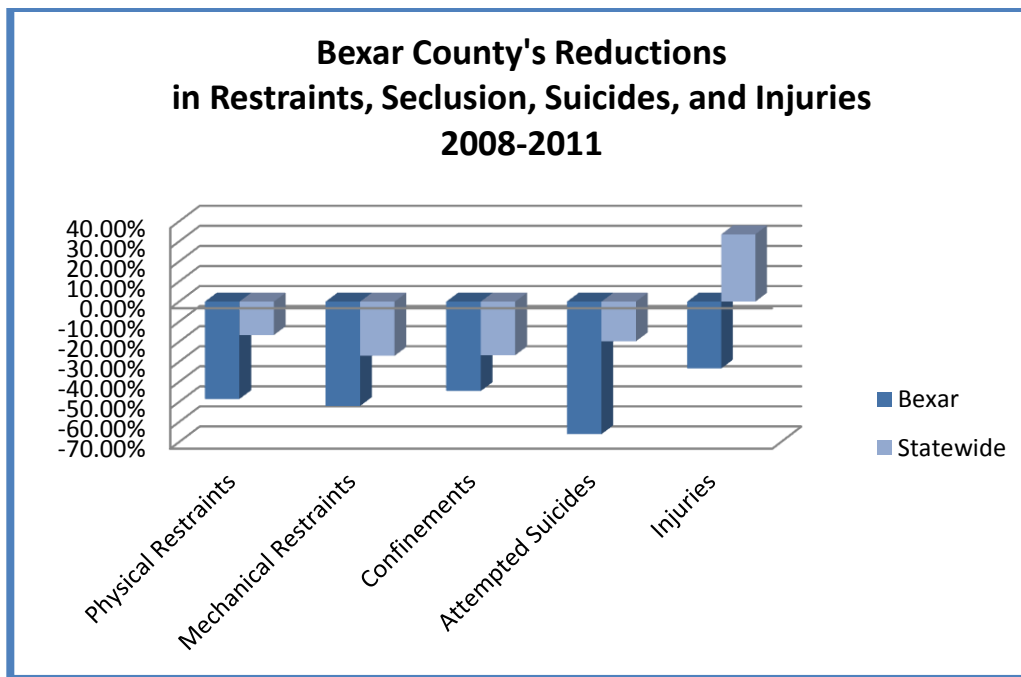
### REDUCING SECLUSIONS AND RESTRAINTS: THE BEXAR COUNTY INITIATIVE<sup>2</sup>

In 2007, the Bexar County Juvenile Probation Department elected to participate in a seclusion and restraint reduction initiative, supported by the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health. Over the past four years, this initiative has yielded significant results, including less staff turnover and improved youth relationships. Bexar County attributes its success to the complete saturation of the mission and goals set forth by the Hogg Foundation, as well as the ability to provide adequate training for staff at all levels.

The chart below illustrates the overall reductions in seclusions and restraints in Bexar County's secure residential facility between 2008 and 2011.<sup>3</sup>



Injuries in Bexar County’s secure facility have also fallen by a third since 2008, and the county’s reductions in restraints, seclusions, and attempted suicides have similarly **outperformed statewide averages**:<sup>4</sup>



### REDUCING SECLUSIONS AND RESTRAINTS THROUGH TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE: PARTNERING WITH THE HOGG FOUNDATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH

As noted, the Bexar County Juvenile Probation Department partnered with the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health to ensure positive outcomes within its facilities. The stipulations put forth by the Foundation required the Department to implement a trauma-informed care curriculum, which emphasizes the use of de-escalation techniques rather than highlighting various methods of proper restraint. The adopted Initiative came with technical assistance via a toolkit, trainings, supplemental research, and consultations.<sup>5</sup> Despite the upfront costs of training and the resistance by veteran staff, Bexar County has credited the Seclusion and Restraint Reduction Initiative as being a “guide in changing the culture”<sup>6</sup> in its facilities.

#### GOAL OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

*“To provide the organizational guidance, direction, and vision necessary to promote genuine and meaningful change of culture, practices, attitudes, and day-to-day behavior of every employee, volunteer, and participant in the organization.”<sup>7</sup>*

#### SIX TOOLS FOR LEADERSHIP<sup>8</sup>

The tools below have been developed by the Hogg Foundation in regard to the implementation of a trauma-informed care curriculum. Facilities interested in implementing a seclusion and restraint reduction initiative via trauma-informed care should consider these key elements:

1. **SWOT Analysis:** An evaluation of an organization’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; this is used as a starting point to implement a change in culture.
2. **Vision, Value, and Mission:** Defining or re-defining an organization’s vision, value, and mission to reflect a trauma-informed environment.
3. **Policies and Procedures:** Reviewing and revising policies and procedures to ensure alignment with trauma-informed care principles.
4. **Incident Review:** Establishing a sound incident review process to determine whether implementation of the curriculum is being adhered to.
5. **Workforce Development:** Developing and tailoring the training and curriculum to the department’s needs to ensure rapid implementation.
6. **Communications:** Emphasizing communication amongst ALL staff levels to ensure saturation.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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- **Bexar County Juvenile Probation Department:** Michael Martinez, *Juvenile Probation Deputy Chief*, [michael.martinez@bexar.org](mailto:michael.martinez@bexar.org).

## REFERENCES

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., L.M. Finke “The Use of Seclusion is Not an Evidence-Based Practice” (2001).

<sup>2</sup> The information provided within this section was obtained by the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition (TCJC) upon visitation to Bexar County’s Juvenile Probation Department in January 2012.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Data collected for the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission Facility Registry and provided to TCJC by the Texas Juvenile Justice Department, March 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, *It’s Time for Positive Change: Reducing Seclusion and Restraint in Texas*, [http://www.hogg.utexas.edu/uploads/documents/Restraint\\_Brochure\\_101909.pdf](http://www.hogg.utexas.edu/uploads/documents/Restraint_Brochure_101909.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Mike Martinez, Deputy Chief Probation Officer, Bexar County Probation Department; noted during TCJC’s visit to Bexar County in January 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, *Creating a Culture of Care: A Toolkit for Creating a Trauma-Informed Environment*, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-13.