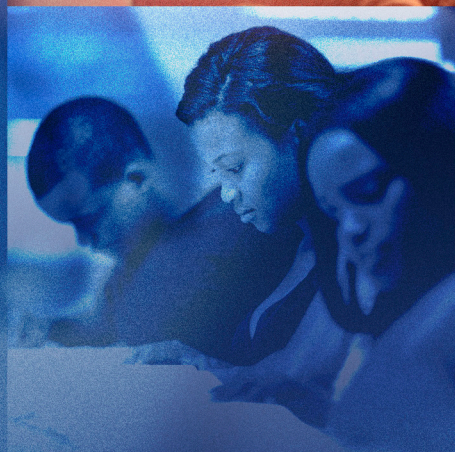


SHARE STORIES:

Messaging for Resources



HARRIS COUNTY
Resources
FOR **Children**
AND **Adults**

This study was executed and prepared by


Outreach Strategists
Research, Media, & Public Affairs

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since it was founded in 1966, **Harris County Resource for Children and Adults** has grown and evolved.

Established as Harris County Child Welfare, Harris County Resources for Children and Adults was built to support services for children taken into custody by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Since then, the role of Harris County Resource for Children and Adults has expanded within the community to provide needed services to people across the lifespan, from children to adults.

Today, the agency is committed to strengthening and empowering children, youth, families, and vulnerable adults by connecting them with support in times of need to ultimately restore and transform the lives of the Harris County residents they serve.

To signify its increased role, the agency adopted a new name, Harris County Resources for Children and Adults (Harris County Resources).

With the decision to change its name (and acronym and email domain), Harris County Resources has an opportunity to effectively introduce itself to the public – a public that needs the services now more than ever.

The coronavirus pandemic shattered many of the systems and social structures which previously supported and protected children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

However, due to a lack of awareness, the public is not taking advantage of the services and resources available to them which impedes early intervention and prevention, when resources can be most effective.

Connecting people to and providing them with needed services is the mission of Harris County Resources for Children and Adults. However, little is publicly known about the agency.

This research project explores and identifies a series of best practices for establishing a brand – by raising awareness, earning credibility, and demonstrating how Harris County Resources positively impacts the community.



The research project consisted of three phases - a literature review; in-depth interviews and discussions with agency staff, stakeholders, and department partners; and focus groups with residents from Harris County's four Commissioner Precincts.

The **literature review** was international in scope, evaluating how protective agencies have overcome negative media, rebranded, and reorganized their services and operations to provide positive experiences for their constituents.

The **in-depth interviews** gathered insights from agency staff, board members, and program partners to provide a greater understanding of points of challenge and areas of opportunity for the agency.

Finally, the **focus groups** with Harris County residents leveraged the insights obtained from both the literature and staff interviews to guide discussions on how to cultivate public awareness of the agency, measure support for the agency's mission, and define best practices for messaging and outreach.

The findings from the research fall into three essential elements:

What to Say

The best messages for introducing and cultivating a brand for Harris County Resources by defining the agency and developing credibility.

How to Say It

The tactics, platforms, and partnerships needed to spread awareness.

Who to Say It To

The audience Harris County Resources needs to target to increase familiarity, affinity, and support for the agency.

The research findings will serve as a guide to assist Harris County Resources for Children and Adults in managing internal communications, community engagement, and outreach to support a unified and responsive agency brand.



KEY FINDINGS



What to Say

Harris County Resources for Children and Adults should prioritize clearly defining its role and building credibility to earn a strong reputation with the community. This begins by emphasizing the services Harris County Resources provides rather than continuing to promote the numerous named programs under the agency's umbrella.

Harris County Resources should place a greater emphasis on its preventative and voluntary services and the positive outcomes it delivers for Harris County to minimize further confusion with the Department of Family Protective Services.

By providing clear information to the public about the free services available, populations served, and agency background - over time, people will be able to recognize and value the positive role Harris County Resources plays in the community.



How to Say It

To adequately publicize the agency's community role, Harris County Resources should prioritize agency promotion by getting safely back into the community, utilizing referral partnerships, and making use of earned and social media to elevate success stories and demonstrate agency expertise.

Harris County Resources should focus on its role as a community asset by providing digital content (videos, downloadable collateral, etc.) and utilizing social media platforms to improve overall standing and visibility.

To further demonstrate its role as a resource for all, the agency should prioritize using accessible language designed to be easily understood.



Who to Say It To

Harris County Resources will be able to expand reach and recognition by adjusting its communications strategies to address the county at large. Specifically, the agency must connect with the adults who are responsible for the care and well-being of vulnerable or at-risk children and adults.

All messaging should be developed with the intention of being understood by these connectors to serve the ultimate goal of expanding awareness and building community support for Harris County Resources.

LITERATURE REVIEW



This section reviews the available literature regarding the reputation of Child Protective Services (CPS), the effects of a negative image of CPS, and how best to overcome those obstacles. These findings can be applied to the rebranding efforts of Harris County's Resources for Children and Adults.

SCOPE OF REVIEW

This literature review commenced by focusing on understanding the negative reputation associated with CPS and child welfare services, surfacing different approaches to overcome this hurdle, and identifying best practices for rebranding.

Outreach Strategists compiled and analyzed a variety of sources including news articles, government and non-profit reports, and academic journals found through Google Scholar and Google News. In addition to these Internet searches, this review includes sources from the ProQuest, JSTOR, and Nexis databases.

Sources were identified using terms such as "child protective services," "welfare agencies," "reputation," "rebranding," and "reform." These searches yielded limited source counts, likely due to how comprehensive rebranding efforts have been isolated instances.

General Internet searches initially yielded hundreds of thousands of results, but many were discarded due to their tangential relation to CPS or alternate definitions for CPS (i.e. Chicago Public Schools). Once examples of rebranding were found, more location-specific research was conducted for New Jersey, New York, Florida, Texas, Arizona, and Australia.

A majority of sources date to pre-pandemic times. This process resulted in 1,042 articles, 75 which were deemed relevant to this study. Following the compilation and sorting of the relevant articles, they were further assessed to determine which would be most helpful in this review. This resulted in 34 articles which were included and analyzed for this report.



CRITICAL SOURCE DOCUMENTS

While the scope of the review was significant, there were a few resources which highlighted the need for positive branding and how best to create change for child welfare programs.

The following articles best address effective means of rebranding and rehabilitating an agency's reputation.

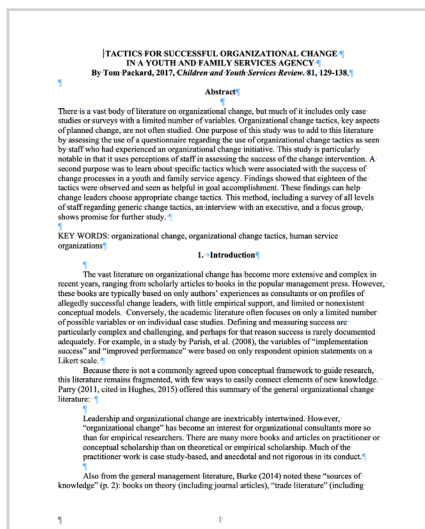


The Social Outrage Routinization Process in Child Protective Services (CPS) System

This article highlighted how a snowball effect can tarnish the reputation of CPS in a community by capitalizing on the community's fear and drowning out any successes or positive impacts the agency may have recently achieved.

The collective outrage cultivated following a CPS-related tragedy can lead to reforms in the system, which this article highlighted using New Jersey as an example. Camasso and Jagannathan assert these tragedies elicit three responses cementing the image of CPS as a dark figure in social services: a "zero-tolerance" hard line approach by the agency; an entrenched culture of eschewing change and attention; and a cycle of organizational upheaval in the form of mass workforce turnover.

The authors argue while this does lead to change, the change is often not as comprehensive as it needs to be. Their proposed remedy to these situations is having an appropriate tragedy response and maintaining a healthy communication strategy with the media, the community, policy makers, and other stakeholders.



Tactics For Successful Organizational Change in a Youth and Family Services Agency

This article examined different approaches to organizational change by presenting a case study of a human services organization undergoing a structural change process. A primary focus of the process was a rebranding effort including renaming the agency and creating a new media branding kit.

The study examined outcomes, the change management process, and how it was perceived by the employees. Packard identified staff input as essential to the rebranding process, and how the rebranding impacted positive change for the organization because it communicated the changes to the public and created a new culture and environment for the staff emphasizing the organization's mission and services.

Through aesthetic and semantic changes the organization was able to successfully shift its public image.



SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW

Negative Brand Impact on Agency Work

While the goal of Child Protective Services is to benefit children and families, the media emphasis on episodic and systemic failures make it enormously difficult for protective agencies to overcome negative brand reputations.

The negative reactions are rooted in perceptions of racism, economic discrimination, and systemic abuse within the custody ecosystem. This can make it more difficult for an agency to conduct its work because families are less trusting of the systems designed to serve and protect them. This lack of trust can lead parents to not seek essential aid (such as housing or nutritional assistance) out of fear they will be reported for neglect.

Further, families are more likely to drop out of interventions due to the feeling they are being punished for circumstances out of their control. This has exacerbated risk as the need for social and protected services has increased over the last several years, due in part, to the COVID-19 pandemic and rising opioid abuse.

In an attempt to change these perceptions, agencies have adopted several strategies to reposition themselves, including using differential response systems, seeking community partnerships, and renaming and rebranding the agencies. The research shows in many cases the rebranding and renaming were accompanied by organizational changes.

The research suggests highlighting the successes of child welfare services and their attempts at reform is vital to rehabilitating protective agencies with the public, thereby improving their ability to deliver services to those in need.



New Jersey

New Jersey's CPS program was inundated with negative press over the course of a decade, starting with 2003 allegations of misconduct and failures

to investigate reports of neglect and child abuse.

In 2012, New Jersey announced they would be renaming their Department of Youth and Family Services to the Department of Child Protection and Permanency (DCPP), accompanied by a system-wide restructuring.

While stories of corruption, bureaucratic mismanagement, and massive budget deficits dominated the media narrative for a few additional years, the agency changed the narrative by developing a messaging and media toolkit for counties to create community support for DCPD programming, through the Supporting Strong Families in New Jersey plan for 2014-2017.

By engaging with the media and communicating directly with the families they hoped to assist, DCPD rehabilitated its image. Since the start of the pandemic, it has continued to highlight its work, especially as the volume of incident reports increases.



New York City

New York City's Administration for Children's Services (ACS) was renamed from Child Welfare Services in 1995, but over time lost the benefit of the name

change. ACS has seen massive organizational and brand-related changes over the last two decades. In 2020, they unveiled a new logo, touting "NYC Children" rather than the ACS branding.

This move echoes the experiences of other reviewed agencies – to emphasize the agency's focus on creating a better environment for the city's youth.

Part of ACS' success comes from their continuous quality improvement (CQI) system which periodically reviews their progress and makes adjustments. They have successfully enacted several strategies such as agency and community child-welfare partnership

programs like Harlem's Children's Zone. This strategy has served as a template for other large cities including Chicago, and other evidence-based practices.

The agency's reputation has improved over the last few years, with ACS receiving \$65 million in funding to distribute among non-profits, and pioneering new approaches to connecting with the community. They have also been very diligent with their media relations, and have attempted to create consistency in the organization's leadership to foster a perception of reliability.



Florida

In an effort to reclaim control of the narrative around state-provided child welfare services, Florida renamed its Department of Health

and Rehabilitative Services to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) in 1997. This rebranding took place alongside a restructuring effort.

However, the child welfare system in Florida was still considered one of the worst in the nation due to case backlogs, low adoption rates, and a capacity shortage in the foster care system leading to children sleeping in government offices. Due to the inability to improve, in 2006 the state privatized their CPS program. This privatization resulted in DCF overseeing a variety of private, local community-based care organizations, with a bumpy transition leading to numerous jurisdictional and supervisory issues.

In 2012, Florida again attempted to rebrand the agency with the adoption of the "My Florida Families" campaign which emphasized keeping families together and empowered. The rebrand included a new logo and a social media overhaul. Since then, Florida has had improved media coverage despite ranking 37th in the nation for child well-being according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Kids Count report.

In 2020, Florida's Annual Progress and Services Report renewed the state's commitment to communicating with families and implementing community-informed improvements to moderate success.

There have been some improvements, like in Gainesville, which has benefited from a partnership



between family welfare services and community-driven programs such as GNV4ALL, modeled after New York City's Harlem Children's Zone. Programs with a grassroots approach and community-backed solutions tended to be more successful.

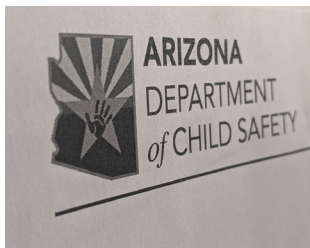


Texas

In Texas there has been a shift to privatize child welfare in Bexar and Fort Worth counties as part of "community-based care." Private organizations

oversee counties or regions instead of government controlled entities, similar to the system used by Florida's DCF. These efforts have triggered criticism as allegations of abuse and neglect have increased. The negative image of CPS across Texas has prompted numerous attempts by the state legislature to overhaul the child welfare system.

There haven't been other regions attempted a rebrand similar to the efforts by Harris County Resources. One of the larger South Texas and Houston adoption services, Arms Wide (previously Spaulding for Children), did undergo a rebrand in 2017 in the hopes of reaching more families and highlighting the expansive nature of their work.



Arizona

In 2014, then-Governor Jan Brewer convened the legislature to change the name of the state's protective agency – from the Division of Child Safety and Family

Services to the Department of Child Safety. After an enormous state scandal, where CPS had effectively shelved 6,500 cases without investigations, the old Child Protection Services division of the Department of Economic Security was abolished and replaced with the new Division of Child Safety and Family Services.

Despite the name change and reorganization, Arizona continued to struggle – as a fast growing state, cases surged with the population, and backlogs increased.

In 2019, Arizona DCS attempted another rebrand. Their efforts included an uplifting video spotlighting the agency's mission by sharing a narrative of

real cases and using testimonials of former foster youth who now work for the agency. The video demonstrated the role of caseworkers, which the agency claimed helped with retention.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z0D0vSHfk_Y

The video labeled DCS employees "secret superheroes" and reported staff praise helped build internal pride and increased productivity and accountability. These approaches appeared to be successful, as caseloads dropped, more than a hundred new positions were added, hotline wait times were reduced, and retention increased.

Recently, these positive gains appear to have evaporated in the context of the pandemic. Caseloads and wait times are soaring, and a few new negative incidents are driving media coverage within the state. Despite this current trend, the principles behind the pre-pandemic efforts may hold value in the current context.



Australia

In 2020, the Children's Protection Society (CPS), located in Melbourne, Australia, rebranded as Kids First. Organized as a nonprofit in 1896, and certified as a protective

agency in 1970, CPS served as a direct provider for 15 years. In 1985, the state reasserted its direct responsibility as a service provider based on the modes of what the Society had started.

Kids First focused its rebrand in a familiar way – focusing on the acronym HEART – for Hope, Empowerment, Accountability, Respect, and Trust.

Deploying a heart-themed monograph of the letter K as their logo, Kids First remains an active nonprofit, driving research, and assisting the government in filling service gaps.



CONCLUSION

Improving the brand and reputation of protective service organizations is not as simple as an agency name change. The public responds more to material changes in service delivery and tangible commitments to upholding the values and ideals of the agency.

Brands are driven by media coverage and community experiences with the agency. The research demonstrates it is essential to show consistent commitment to change and positive impact. While rebranding exercises are helpful, as seen in the case of New Jersey, effective restructuring (internal realignments, community partnerships, etc.) can do more to earn public trust.

More than anything else, consistent public-facing communication and internal culture changes are the best tactics for an effective repositioning.

The challenges for Harris County Resources will be different. Harris County Resources is not a protective agency - with a focus on prevention and intervention and providing services based on referrals from protective agencies, it should be easier to build a positive, experience-based brand.

INFORMANT INTERVIEWS





METHODOLOGY

Given the broad scope of Harris County Resource's work, Outreach Strategists interviewed agency staff, board members, and stakeholders to obtain a comprehensive perspective of the agency's internal and external reputation to assist in the development of best messaging practices.

Between January 10 and March 10, 2022, Outreach Strategists conducted in-depth interviews with 48 Harris County Resource's employees, board members, and program partners.

Interviewee experience ranged widely and included: members of the Foundation and Operating boards, staff across programmatic fields, Justice of the Peace court staff and referring partners, the Department of Family and Protective Services, and Senior Justice Assessment Center partners.

Through these conversations, Outreach Strategists identified holes in staff knowledge and potential communications tactics applicable to the specific needs and intentions of Harris County Resources for Children and Adults.

KEY FINDINGS

The value and impact Harris County Resources for Children and Adults has on the communities it serves is evident in the quality and attitude of its stakeholders, staff, and program partners. Interviews with agency staff revealed a highly motivated and capable group of professionals dedicated to making a difference.

However, the internal and external understanding of the agency's scope and impact is limited.

Conversations with staff and partners illuminated a gap in organizational knowledge. Program partners confessed to knowing little about the range of services offered by Harris County Resources. Agency staff reported partitioning among programs and admitted having little understanding of the work performed by other programs under the agency umbrella.

The internal and external confusion about the full set of services offered by Harris County Resources limits public awareness, hinders referrals, and minimizes the agency's public impact.

The lack of programmatic cohesion is reflected in prior social media and marketing efforts, where programs have been emphasized ahead of services or the agency's role as a whole. This, staff reported, continues to limit public awareness of the agency.

Participants agree marketing to and engaging with the public by using positive and accessible messages will be most effective when establishing a clear, positive, and cohesive brand.



With the agency name change already in effect, discussions with staff and stakeholders illuminated several other practices essential to increasing agency visibility and recognition across Harris County:



What to Say

Staff asserted the necessity of emphasizing agency services more than its named programs - many of which the general public does not recognize.

Staff believes this will assist in clarifying and defining the agency with both internal stakeholders and county residents.

Staff also mentioned the need to stop “apologizing” for the relationship with DFPS. Keep the emphasis on what Harris County Resources does, not what it does not do (take children into custody), or how it is not the state agency.

Focus on prevention and intervention, and less on the “protective” framework.

Elevate positive success stories and agency wins to overcome widespread misconceptions and negative media coverage.



How to Say It

Harris County Resources needs a comprehensive review of the agency’s online presence, with a particular focus on services. Providing resources (videos and downloadable collateral) and utilizing social media platforms will improve overall standing and visibility.

Getting safely out into the community and using partner relationships will help drive awareness of service offerings.

To counteract negative coverage use earned media to elevate success stories and assert expertise.

Utilize accessible language to help Harris County residents understand available services.



Who to Say It To

Because the people who Harris County Resources services are often minors or adults in guardianship, marketing to them will be of limited utility. To drive and expand the awareness of Harris County Resources, the agency needs to adjust its messaging to the county at large.

Specifically, Harris County Resources must reach the adults connected to or in charge of the care and well-being of vulnerable or at-risk children and adults, and keep in mind accessible language for the broader county-wide audience.



SUMMARY OF INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

POINTS OF CHALLENGE

Interviews with Harris County staff, stakeholders, and department partners surfaced four points of challenge and opportunity for the agency.

Minimal Public Awareness

Internal conversation with Harris County Resources for Children and Adults revealed minimal public awareness of the agency, undermining its impact.

Despite its role as a provider of supportive services for the entire community, Harris County Resource for Children and Adults is one of the county's "best-kept secrets."

"I think we are the best-kept secret in the County."

"Even people in the county don't know what we do."

"Many of Harris County's most vulnerable children and adults require support and do not know there are free resources available to them."

"People are not aware we exist."

"I'm not sure that the general public knows that much about us."

"I don't think the general public has a real sense of all that Harris County Resources does."

The lack of agency awareness is, in part, due to the recent agency name change and the coronavirus pandemic hindering on-the-ground community outreach efforts.

The Existing Focus On Programs Over Agency & Relationship To DFPS

Agency staff pointed out how the existing approach has been to promote individual programs, rather than the agency, or its mission, vision, and values.

"Typically my pitch is really just to sell the Positive Youth Development program or even the services that we offer in the Youth Services Division."

Due to the generally negative public associations with Child Protective Services, many of the agency's voluntary family programs distanced themselves from the County and the department. This distancing caused the positive work and press of Harris County Resources programs to detach from the agency.

Inconsistent messaging contributes to the lack of public awareness and understanding of Harris County Resources.

Prior to the name change, agency staff working in voluntary services would first have to define themselves as who they weren't (CPS) before they could assert who they were. Even now, the linkage between DFPS and some of the services offered by the agency, creates the potential for confusion. Agency staff urge a clearer and cleaner distinction be presented to the public.



Broad Agency Offerings And Internal Silos Can Confuse The Public

Staff acknowledge the numerous services Harris County Resources offers and the varied populations the agency assists makes it a challenge to succinctly define the agency's role within the community.

"It's hard to talk about minors and vulnerable adults in the same sentence. When we took on guardianship, it changed our mission and made it a little more foggier. I think it's good. I think we do a great job of guardianship, but it's hard to look at the ends of the spectrum."

When asked to describe what the agency does, many staff limited their description to their program work. These responses reveal a lack of internal understanding of Resources' diverse services.

"There's siloing within our division still."

This lack of internal awareness undermines the agency's function as a community resource.

The Website Is Not A Resource

When people are seeking information or assistance, they go online. As a primary resource for individuals to find needed information, the agency website can be invaluable in establishing and promoting the brand.

In interviews, staff questioned whether people who are not already involved or familiar with the agency would know how to navigate the site to find relevant services.

Agency interviews revealed the Harris County Resources website provides neither clarity nor ease of access.

"Would you know where to go based on this? Maybe not."

"I would typically have to walk them through it, because I think our website is confusing. It is not necessarily the easiest to navigate for a parent."

In addition to lacking simple core service descriptions, the website is organized using programmatic acronyms, labels, and internal agency jargon.

"It's not just neglected and abused children [...] There's another piece where we actually have support services to strengthen families."

"Would they even know what every program does? And who they serve? And what the requirements are for every program that we have?"

Currently, the agency website muddies the agency brand and prevents people from receiving services.

"Maybe search by [...] the service I need."

For Harris County Resources to build a brand as an accessible resource to county residents in need of assistance, its public-facing collateral has to be simpler and more accessible to its intended audience.



STAFF COMMITMENT

As an agency built on the competency of its employees and commitment of its Board and partners, Harris County Resources is strongly positioned to lead.

The staff, universally, have their hearts in the job and are committed to the mission, vision, and values of the agency as a whole. Board members love the work of Harris County Resources and its partner programs are deeply appreciative of the support they receive from the agency.

This foundation of committed leaders is essential in counteracting agency challenges and initiating breakthrough solutions and innovations.

"The caring factor of what we do and the lives that we help daily [...] it's just a passion we have for it. I love the people, I love the work, this really is where my heart is."

"It goes all the way up the chain that you feel that support."

"I'm here because my heart is here. I want to make an impact in someone's life who is disadvantaged, who is underserved and give people enough equality and you know equity and chances."



"I'm trying to keep kids out of systems because we were all young and stupid once and we made bad decisions but we got a second chance, you know. [...] It's important work to help people get better and to let them steer where they are going because I think we have a unique perspective, we help people choose what's best for them or we chose something else.."

"People with lots of experience that really care about who they serve. They're always going the extra mile. If we don't have something let's find it."

"The way that we operate in this building, I have so many people who have so much experience in different social services that if I get stuck, I can walk down the hall."

"I didn't ever find another place that I liked as much. [...] It's the best work. I think the work that we do makes a difference. I think it makes a big difference and I think our staff they to do the job well. [...] [T]hey reach a lot of kids and families who are in danger of not being able to stay in their home, finish their education, not hurt themselves. [Our] people are first responders really. It's an honor to support them in the work that we do."

"We never strayed from the mission of caring for families and children."

"The work comes first and the families and children come first."

"I'm really passionate about making an impact in someone's life before it's too late."

"I've worked four different programs and I've enjoyed each and every experience with that program."

"I love working with youth. People will tell you, I absolutely love working with youth."

"If a kid says they need help, no matter if it's a parent, whether it's a staff person who has a kid who needs help, or just a kid in the community - I'm there to try to help you find those resources. And I love that about my job."

"I feel like what I do makes a difference."

"I've got a great team!"





INTERVIEW RESPONSES

What To Say: Promote Services Not Programs

Adjust Internal and External Agency Perceptions

Harris County Resource for Children and Adults provides services to vulnerable populations.

"Harris County Resources serves people across the lifespan. It tries to meet them where they are with what they need. Those needs could be different for different ages of people. [...] We serve adults and children, but we have our eye on placements for all of those people that may be a traditional family or a non-traditional family, but making sure that basic needs are met."

Currently, Harris County Resources is marketing its programs (by name), rather than its services. To build public recognition of Harris County Resources for Children and Adults, staff and partners believe the agency must highlight its services.

"List services, not programs. Which is a different way of engaging families, because you don't have to have the name right, you just have to have an idea of what you want."

"Talk about our services and what we do rather than who we are."

"I think we spend a lot of time trying to describe these different programs."

By further connecting services within the agency, existing staff can respond to challenges and implement changes designed to grow the agency and the number of resources provided.

"The challenge is to unify these programs under one department."

Agency staff view Harris County Resources as an open door provider of services to all vulnerable populations in the area. If you need help, the agency will assist you in getting on the path you need to be.

However, agency marketing and services have been siloed.

"I talk about silos, when people don't always understand what other programs do but they're pretty disparate programs."

"It's not really interactive."

"A lot of programs have their own brand. We really haven't marketed our agency as a whole, we just market the programs."

Programs with overlapping missions and service populations remain separate within the agency umbrella.

"There's siloing within our division still."

Employees believe focusing on services will clarify the agency's brand internally and externally. By emphasizing services, children, seniors, and concerned parties can better access to the resources they need, rather than being required to know the complicated and non-intuitive program names or acronyms.



Create Distinctions Between DFPS and Resources

One long-time hurdle the agency has faced is the negative public association with Child Protective Services.

"Always having to explain first that we are not DFPS. And not only explaining to the school, but to the parent and to the student, I'm not going to take your kid."

"Before, when we met with families, we always had to explain how we were Harris County Children's Protective Services, but not really."

"They had to trust us in spite of our name."

Staff attributes this association to an over-emphasis on negative stories by the media and general public discomfort with child abuse and neglect.

"What you hear and what you see are usually going to be the negative."

"The news is overwhelmingly negative, because all of the good work gets passed over and not really talked about."

"Part of it has to do with people's discomfort with child abuse in the first place. [...] The other part of it is there's a lot of myths around when CPS gets involved it's because somebody's questioning my judgment in discipline."

"The only way people know who we are, unfortunately, is when you hear [...] a sad story in the news of a student passing away and there will be crisis counselors all day to provide support."

"I think when you say protective services, the first thing that comes to mind is 'I'm in trouble, I'm a bad parent, they're going to take my child away.'"

"Child abuse is such a sensitive subject. [...] We don't want to talk about it."

"There's that stigma that comes with it."

These harmful misconceptions previously complicated agency efforts to engage caregivers in preventative and voluntary child services.

"We are a prevention and intervention program. The more that we separate ourselves from DFPS, and that we talk about the programs that we have here, and the prevention and intervention programs that we have, the things we have to offer, the better off we are."

"How do you engage families when you have to tell them who you are not before you can tell them who you are?"

"I had a lot of kids and families who wouldn't even want to join my group because of the [old] name. When I would tell them who I worked for [they said] 'I don't want my kid to be a part of CPS.'"

"The kids never wanted to be associated with 'I'm in a program where you talk about kids who are in custody.'"



Because the name transferred a level of public mistrust and discomfort, even many programs within Harris County Resources which worked closely with families and guardians distanced themselves from the agency.

"I think we were one of the programs that were hindered by the old name. [...]. For many years, our staff would downplay the agency because they would send emails from their school emails because they didn't want to use the CPS email because we are, you know, a voluntary agency."

"They did not play up the county connection because of the name. I think now they can offer the county connection as possible resources."

"I used to try not to say the name at all, but if you signed a form, you would see 'HCPS:'"

The name change rectified this.

"Resources sounds more positive."

"I think they [staff] are more willing to bring the county in because everything doesn't say CPS on it anymore, but for a long time they didn't maximize the association."

"The [new] name, it gives us a leg up from the beginning."

"I think some significant progress has been made to distinguish us from DFPS, but, that said, I think there's a lot of work to do."

Stay Positive

While the name change has been beneficial for the agency's programs, staff still feels the need to address negative media coverage and public discomfort.

"With every bad story out there, you need ten good ones to undo the damage that's been done."

"People don't understand what County Protective Services [is], versus what DFPS is, right? You know the State Protective Services. They think it's the same thing."

"There's that stigma still going on and I think it's going to take a bit for us to go beyond it, but I think it's doable."

Participants emphasized the importance of amplifying agency "wins" and success stories.

"All of the successes don't really get discussed."

"The year before last we had a conference, [...] and we brought one of our mothers with us [...], she spoke [...]. All of the education in my little three points, that meant nothing to what this woman said. It was so powerful. There was not a dry eye in the house."

"I think we as an organization can do a better job of tooting our own horn so to speak. Even within our own agency, sometimes people may be aware of all the wonderful things that are happening in their division, but may not be as aware of things that are happening in other divisions."



"We get kind of swallowed up, you know 'that's just another Harris County Department' [...]. I think that we have to distinguish ourselves in a good way."

Using positive framing and narrative storytelling will counteract the negative media coverage often associated with the previous agency name.

"We need to pull people's heartstrings."

"I think in our work, we need to share stories. The impact that we do lies there."

"I think it is really crucial in our work that we involve victims and survivors."

"I think there are certain positive things happening that could be chronicled more, you know, [...] with our local news agencies."





How to Say It: Meet People Where They Are

Leveraging The Agency Website And Social Media

Participants asserted the importance of utilizing social media to boost public awareness and emphasize the agency's brand as a service for Harris County children and adults.

"A better social media presence."

"I do think our social media presence should be stronger than it is in every aspect, especially in the schools."

"We need a stronger social media presence. [...] We have to be present in the way people are communicating and social media is the way people communicate."

"I do wish we had a stronger marketing presence where we could share all of the things that we do."

"I think we need to be more active on Facebook, on social media, and we really need to show the wins and we need to create that we are here to support, and here is the new face of us."

"I think we need to be more active on social media. Everyone is using social media at least one plus hour a day."

"People will share and somebody will benefit from that."

Starting with the website, staff recommended making the site a resource for concerned parties to find information and services.

"When I looked at the website, [...] someone with ten plus years experience in social services field, I did not understand what we were doing. So that's what, you know, we are giving the public."

"If I'm using social media and getting people to use my website, I'd better have a ready website. You know?"

Earn More Media Coverage

Agency staff felt utilizing local broadcast media would help increase public awareness.

"She [morning TV talk show host] invited me [at my old position]... to talk about the program. I think something like that would be really, really helpful."

Staff and partners believe the agency will earn credibility by better using internal and external messengers to advocate for the work of Harris County Resources which will counterbalance the previous negative coverage of Child Protective Services.

"It would be really smart to get some people that write to become interested in us and that it would be someone separate from us saying some things about us. Whether it's the whole agency or whether it's a division of the agency. [...] It's all real negative. How about some uplifting stories? How about some victory stories?"

"Developing more people in our agency that really can, you know, sit there thirty minutes live interview, you know, that's a skill set."



Use Accessible Language

Staff asserted the importance of avoiding the use of internal shorthand and program acronyms to better connect with people in a way they understand.

“‘Positive Youth Development’ will make a lot more sense than CYD Gulfton, CYD Pasadena, and YAC. Right? They mean nothing. They are three different programs that are supervised by three different people, but you can put them all together.”

“If I’m a parent [...] trying to get services because my child is having truancy issues, like, I don’t know what you are talking about. The language wasn’t understandable and clear.”

“It was very much designed for someone who was working in the field for a long time [...] instead of someone who is trying to understand how the programs work. The services were described in a very mechanical way where you would call it TRIAD, CYS. It meant nothing to me.”

By softening the language to be more accessible, experts believe people will be more likely to come to Resources and find the support they need.

“Think like a parent.”

“I should feel empowered to make that phone call or submit that form or come walk in to the location. I should feel that I’m not alone.”

“Being more inclusive [...] more approachable”

“Clearly and openly inclusive saying all are welcome, no requirements.”

“Making it more palatable for people. [...] Getting the space to digest things first before you really look for help.”

“We need to make it more palatable and more non-judgmental and more approachable to people.”

“If I’m a parent and if I’m looking for ways to help my child, I should be able to go to this website without feeling accused, without feeling shamed, without feeling anything but just finding resources.”

“Think about how people are going to take this who have absolutely no experience.”

Reconnect With The Community

Finally, to boost public awareness and agency recognition, staff referenced pre-pandemic tactics (booths at events, in-person partner meetings, and campus-based activities) to reach Harris County residents and potential partners. Getting back to some of these events, and cultivating community partners will help increase awareness of Harris County Resources’ mission and service offerings.





Who To Say It To: The Connector

As a largely preventative and voluntary agency, Harris County Resources for Children and Adults relies on the assistance and referral of caregivers and guardians. This is the unifying element across agency programs and service populations.

“At the end of the day, in most cases, our services cannot be provided without an adult’s consent.”

“There’s not an age group of human being that we don’t cherish and that we don’t try to find the very best services possible for. Relieve suffering, that’s a big focus.”

To expand its reach, the agency will need to tailor its messaging to the people connected to or in charge of the care and well-being of vulnerable or at-risk children and adults.

“It’s almost like the main population you are trying to preach to isn’t really the children or the seniors, it’s the adults. To get them to really understand the services.”

“We can put the responsibility on the adults to be the ones who can kind of support our services in that way.”

“I know a person who is incapacitated is not going to visit our website, that person is obviously is not a child. But a parent who is at their wits end and doesn’t know what to do might be a person, would they find it this way? No. Because they would know to go to TRIAD instead we should be promoting our services versus our programs.”

While not directly mentioned in the agency name, Harris County Resources ultimately provides service to these people in the middle. To care for children and adults in guardianship, reaching and assisting their support systems is critical.

“In order to provide a child a service, I better be able to provide an adult a service. Because I can’t even provide a service without their consent.”

“They may not be mentioned there, but without them, it cannot happen and we need their involvement.”

“We’re handling two very different ends of the spectrum and that person in the middle, [...] the self-sufficient adult, is totally crucial to everything we do.”

The interviews illuminated the majority of people served by the agency come from referrals, not direct appeals for help.

“How often are you going to ask for help versus how often are you going to be willing to help? In most cases, we don’t want to ask for help but we are willing to help.”

To increase agency awareness and services, Harris County Resources must prioritize speaking directly to the public.

“Finding opportunities for them to help people and think that they are helping people when they are actually getting the help as well.”

Messaging will require “pulling at people’s heartstrings” to have people consider themselves a part of the change equation.



LIST OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Participant	Role
Anna Bell	Foundation Board President
Lidya Kushner	Board Treasurer
Marilyn DeMontrond	Board Member
Charlene Hunter James	Board Member
Phil Kunetka	Foundation and Operating Board Member
Sean McPherson	Board Member
Janet Stansbury	Board Member
Ellie Sweeney	Board Member
Joel Levine	Executive Director
Mary Green	Transitional Services Director, Hay Center
Tammy Hetmaniak	BEAR Director
Jeff Alexander	Deputy Executive Director
Matt Broussard	Director of Youth Services
Claudia Gonzalez	Adult Services Director
Dr. Lawrence Thompson	Integrated Health Services Director
Estella Olguin	Senior Communications Manager
Candies Bryant	Deputy Director for Youth Services
Tyra Hinton	Deputy Director for Adult Services
Gulsah Langan	Deputy Director of Youth Services
Kristen Ballard	CYS Program Director
Bernadette Cashin	Quality Improvement Manager
Evelyn Emdin	Kinder Shelter Manager
Rachel Francis	TRIAD JP Court Liaison Supervisor
Cherease Glasper	Positive Youth Development
Ramiro Guzman	Manager of 24/7 Intake-Crisis Intervention
Tyra Hinton	Deputy Director for Adult Services
Lucinda Lee	TRIAD JP Court Liaison Supervisor
Barbara Lopez	SJAC Manager



Participant	Role
Dralanjelia Porter	JP Court Court Liaison
Claudia Ramos	CYS Program Manager
Twila Ross	Nurturing Parenting Program Manager
Celena Stewart	Parent Teen Survival Class Coordinator
Delmi Valdivia	Administrative Assistant
CJ Broussard-White	Department of Family Protective Services
Montorea Thomas	Department of Family Protective Services
Delphine Baldone	Adult Protective Services
Kevin Bussey	Cypress Fairbanks ISD
Johanna Craft	District Attorney's Office
Israel Flores	Aldine ISD
Juan Antonio Flores	Aldine ISD
Adriana Franco	Adult Protective Services
Claudia Gonzalez	JP Court
Perlita Leija	Aldine ISD
Jerrell Purvis	North Forest ISD
Alfonso Sahagun	Aldine ISD
Gregory D. Skannal	MindSpring
Sarah Strang	The Harris Center
Richard Woods	Aldine ISD
Donna Yost	Deer Park ISD



RESIDENT FOCUS GROUPS



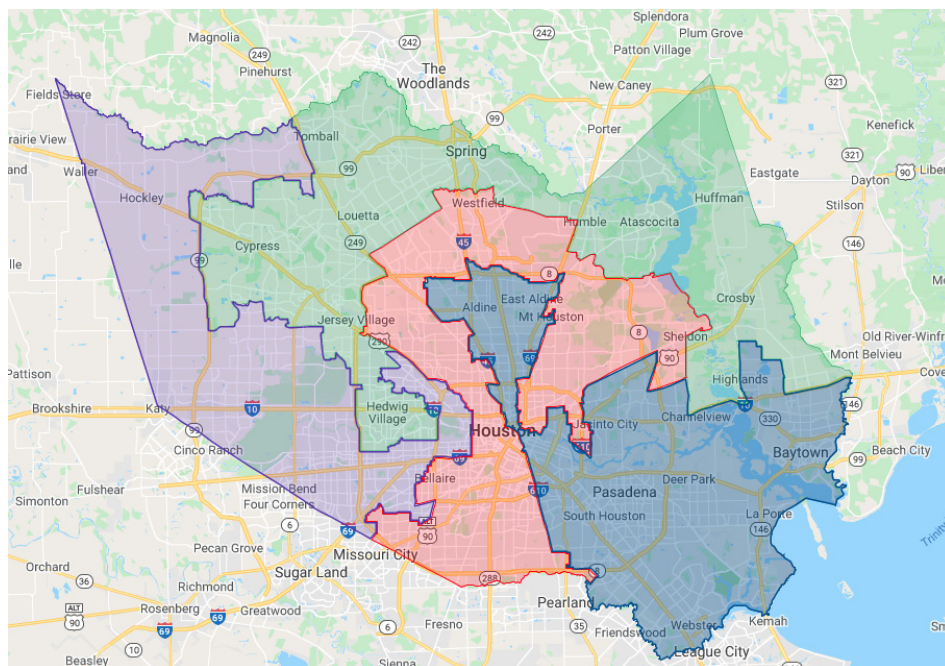
COMPOSITION AND DESIGN

Harris County Resources for Children and Adults is designed to serve residents across Harris County.

To build upon findings in the literature review and the insights from the in-depth interviews, focus groups with Harris County residents were conducted to measure awareness of the agency. The groups provided insights about public support for government-funded services for children and adults and evaluated participant reactions and responses to descriptions about the agency.

Between February 23 and February 24, Outreach Strategists conducted four focus groups among 35 participants.

Precinct	Number of participants	Number of participants who parent or care for a child under 18	Number of participants who live with or take care of parents or adult relative
1	11	5	3
2	7	4	1
3	9	5	3
4	8	4	1

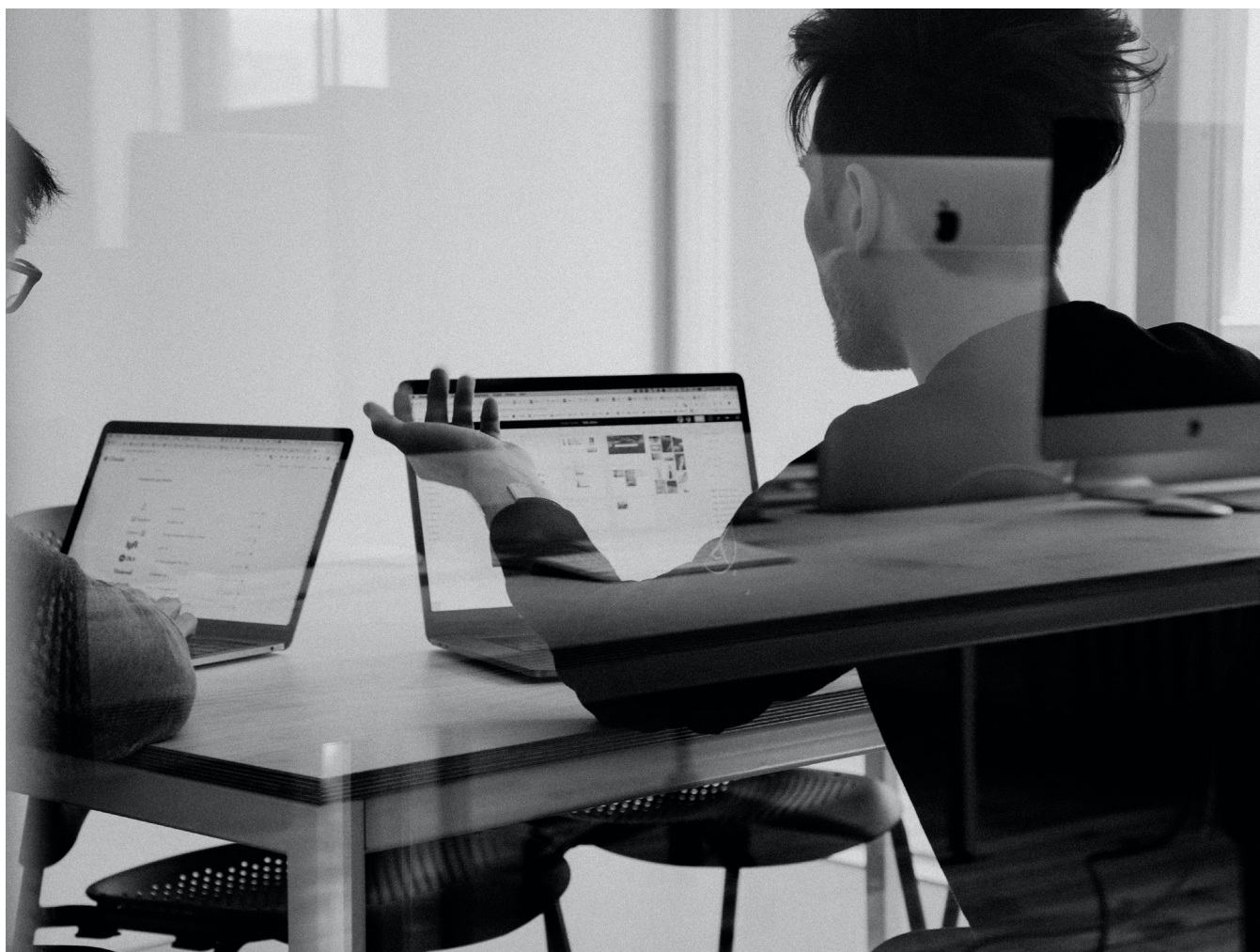


Harris County Commissioner Precincts



DISCUSSION FLOW

Introductions	<p>What is your name?</p> <p>Which area of the city do you live in?</p> <p>How long you have lived in Harris County?</p>
Which area of the city do you live in?	<p>What have the past two years been like?</p> <p>What have the past two years felt like?</p>
Support Systems And Need	<p>What has helped you in the past two years?</p> <p>Do you think the pandemic has been harder on some?</p> <p>Does the government have a responsibility to intervene?</p>
Video	<p>Focus groups were shown a video introducing Harris County Resources for Children and Adults.</p> <p>Participants were asked to provide the following feedback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were You Aware of the Agency? • What Questions Do You Still Have? • Should There Be Changes to the Video? • What Would Help With Agency Credibility?
Logo	<p>Focus groups were shown three draft logos emblematic of Harris County Resources for Children and Adults</p> <p>Participants were asked to provide the following feedback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which Logo Do You Prefer? • What Do You Think the Logos Say About the Agency? • What About The Colors?
Workshop Solutions	<p>Participants were asked to write and share how they would introduce or pitch Harris County Resources for Children and Adults to raise agency awareness.</p>



SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

The focus group discussions painted a dark and concerning picture of a pervasive mental health crisis.

The grief, loss, uncertainty, instability, and isolation brought on by the pandemic have only “magnified” an already growing need for services and resources. Fortunately, in Harris County, there are resources available, but the focus groups revealed limited awareness of the services available through Harris County Resources.

None of the 35 focus group participants from across Harris County’s four Commissioner Precincts knew of Harris County Resources for Children and Adults – even though several participants were connected to schools, social work, and elderly assistance.

Despite this gap in awareness, participants showed support for and alignment with the mission, vision, and values of the agency.



Building The Brand

While the support and need for public resources and services are apparent to Harris County residents, there are several elements to address and overcome to build credibility and awareness.

Several best practices emerged from the focus group discussions:



What to Say

Focus group participants emphasized the importance of defining the agency and establishing credibility to build a strong reputation within the county.

Harris County residents want more information about the services offered, operational and program partnerships, populations served, cost of services, the agency's founding, and track record.

Some participants questioned the government's ability to adequately deliver services. Harris County Resources needs to establish credibility by effectively marketing agency services, staff credentials, client testimonials and statistics, and praise from partners and trusted sources.



How to Say It

Participants across groups were shocked they had never heard of Harris County Resources for Children and Adults. To amplify the agency's message and mission, participants suggested promoting the agency using local broadcast and social media.

Participants also mentioned the importance of connecting with referring partners and distributing detailed information in community settings so everyday people can connect with Harris County Resources.



Who to Say It To

Focus group participants emphasized the importance of raising awareness by speaking to all of Harris County. In every focus group, participants believed people rarely seek support when they need it - it is usually people around those in need who take the first steps in getting help. To reach and connect with the most people, Harris County Resources has to communicate with the county population as a whole to raise awareness of the agency and its services.



PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

Questions I & II. What have the last two years been and felt like?

Question III. How did you make it through these tough times?

The past two years have been difficult for Harris County residents.

"Life was already hard. Most people are living paycheck to paycheck, we've got kids, taxes. This is not what we needed." (Juan B, Group 2)

COVID experiences varied among focus group participants. For some, little changed. For others, careers were stalled, finances suffered, milestones were put on hold, schools went online, and mental and physical health were impacted.

"It hasn't been great." (Wade, Group 4)

"I feel kind of bad because I feel like life didn't change like at all for me." (Eric, Group 4)

"Personally, all my family had COVID. My wife had it the worst, she spent 18 days in the hospital, almost on a ventilator. It really hit close to home." (Wade, Group 4)

"Here, directly in our own household, we've been very fortunate." (Lisa, Group 4)

"My son [...] was home-schooled for basically two years and it's had an impact on our relationship. We saw too much of each other [...] [and] weren't able to get out." (Melvin, Group 3)

"Sometimes we wouldn't work for maybe a month or two so funds were really bad." (Amanda, Group 3)

"Graduations were canceled." (Kheisha B, Group 2)

"We also missed my daughter's high school graduation, and my other daughter's college graduation." (Ruqya S, Group 2)

"I was depressed that I wasn't able to work anymore, and I did feel kind of worthless there for a while, you know just stuck at home." (Melvin, Group 3)

"I got stage three cancer. So, mentally, it was hard to kind of going through everything alone." (Amanda, Group 3)

"Just taking it day by day." (Amanda, Group 3)

Notwithstanding the variety of outcomes, a consistent theme was how participants experienced changes, challenges, and confusion. The persistent volatility of these circumstances has taken a mental toll, especially for participants experiencing separation, isolation, or the loss of loved ones.

"It's created this low-level anxiety, this kind of constant anxiety." (Rachel E, Group 1)

"A lot of uncertainty and almost feeling of being overwhelmed." (Julie C, Group 2)



"All the changes have just become kind of overwhelming." (Julie C, Group 2)

"It's definitely been exhausting and tiring everything with the masks, the variants, the social distancing, the inflation." (Juan B, Group 2)

"I had at least two or three people pass away and having to deal with that over virtual." (Phyllis, Group 4)

"We had a lot of people at work either die or had COVID and [...] added to the uncertainty." (Robert, Group 3)

"One of my friends passed away from COVID and so it was really scary for me." (Nicole R, Group 2)

"During the course of the pandemic, I lost six people who were close to me. And two of them were COVID-related. [...] That piece of personal loss has caused me to spend a lot of time reflecting on the value of personal relationships." (Raymond, Group 1)

"Mentally, it took a toll on us as a family. Especially we had a lot of death in our family during that time. [...] It was almost like you couldn't even mourn your loved ones." (Twitty, Group 4)

What has helped participants through these difficult times has primarily been the support and connection of faith, family, and friends.

"I think what helped me, actually, is family." (Twitty, Group 4)

"My grandchildren keep me going on a daily basis. [...] Having that closeness." (Tracie C, Group 2)

"For me, it was my family." (Phyllis, Group 4)

"You know it's the good friends, church members, and people that just help you." (Zoridia, Group 4)

"My church became something that was amazing when I needed the help the most mentally and physically." (Wade, Group 4)

"My family and friends [...] it's good to have them as my support system. So, I pretty much lean on them for support." (Chelsea, Group 3)

"For me it was faith and religion." (Robert, Group 3)

"If I didn't have the word of God, I would be depressed." (Kheisha B, Group 2)

"Appreciating the time that we were able to spend together. [...] We weren't alone in it." (Julie C, Group 2)



Question IV. Do you think there are people who have had a harder time dealing with the pandemic?

Despite the difficult times people have gone through, focus groups acknowledged the pandemic has been much harder for those who lack resources and support.

"People that were alone had the brunt of it, I'm sure." (Daisy M, Group 2)

Focus group participants recognized the impacts of increased isolation brought on by social distancing, particularly for those who need social systems, structures, and supports as a safeguard.

"There was definitely a lot of stress and anxiety with that isolation." (Lien, Group 3)

"There are a lot of folks who didn't feel they had that support system in place." (Raymond G, Group 1)

"Not having that help from a teacher or a counselor or stuff like that, I'm sure it was tough." (Itzel, Group 1)

COVID has confined many people to their homes, which may not be the safest and best place. This loss of connection allowed people to fall through the cracks.

"You really don't know what's going on behind closed doors, so that's pretty tough. I've just heard a lot of stories." (Itzel J, Group 1)

"I think the confines and other lack of outlets has brought that more to the forefront, and that's unfortunate." (Rachel E, Group 1)

"I saw from a student standpoint [...] struggling with domestic and dating violence and sexual assault. [...] We saw a tremendous uptick in those heartbreaking situations that our students are going through." (Renee, Group 3)

"For some students, school is their safe place." (Nicole R, Group 2)

Participants observed the pandemic's impact on some of the city's most vulnerable populations: youth, persons with disabilities, and senior adults.

"I would think a great deal of the demographics that have suffered is the elderly." (Kheisha B, Group 2)

"There are certain populations that are more impacted than others, like the elderly, but also, I just think it contributed to overall mental health issues. It kind of led to a lot of depression for people." (Julie C, Group 2)

"On the other end of the elderly, [...] we're seeing the impact that it's had on kids. Not only are they behind significantly educationally, [...] but we're also noticing that has impacted their social skills and their mental health." (Nicole R, Group 2)

"I would also think like the elderly people. [...] They didn't have their family members." (Twitty, Group 4)

"I think it was the hardest on the elderly or anybody that was super isolated that doesn't have family or friends near them." (Eric, Group 4)



"When you take in consideration that someone's in a wheelchair - they live alone [...] not having the resources. [...] Having to depend on family and friends." (Shar, Group 3)

"The elderly. The ones that are in a like hospice or assisted living or convalescent home that couldn't have visitors that are used to having their loved ones." (Kheisha B, Group 2)

"I think it has impacted all of us, especially for our seniors. I think a lot of times when things do take place, we don't take a lot of consideration for those who have mental health issues or our seniors who don't have access to family members." (Shar, Group 3)

The participants also noted how the pandemic has "magnified" and exacerbated the pre-existing health and wellness challenges some children, youth, and senior adults were already facing.

"I think everything just got magnified. I think mental illness was there, people knew a little bit about it, maybe they thought some of their kids had it. But quarantine [...] just magnified the problem." (Wade, Group 4)

"I think there were a lot of people that were just kind of barely hanging on mentally before the pandemic. And then, when the pandemic happened it just kind of turned everyone's worlds upside down so then it was a real disaster." (Eric, Group 4)

Those without access or ability to operate or acquire technology, have been significantly impacted and isolated.

"People that are socially isolated and the elderly, especially. [...] They have no one to interact with and they have trouble with technology." (Melvin, Group 3)

"All of a sudden, you know students had to have all kinds of equipment and it never occurred to me that families did not have Internet. [...] When our students started, saying that they didn't have Internet, they didn't have hotspots, they didn't have any of the things that they really needed in order to continue their education that was just a mind-blowing moment. I assumed that everybody had Internet, which is not even close to being true so." (Renee, Group 3)

"I got to see for myself with the neighborhood children, what they were missing. They didn't have the same accessibility as my kids." (Nina, Group 3)

Participants reported seeing this among the elderly, who had to weather the pandemic alone, in the classrooms, where academic performance has been backsliding, and among adolescents who may have been in abusive households, and are now lashing out.

"My mother was in [...] assisted living and she was not allowed to have visitors and then I did not get a chance to go back and she passed a couple of months ago. It was very difficult on her." (Daisy M, Group 2)

"Those kids that when families that were abusive. You're there all day long no outlet to express that. And when you get back, you're acting out you being abusive to people." (Phyllis R, Group 4)

"I've seen that personally with my own kids, it really effected my son a lot. In fact, it still affects him even though he's returned to university. [...] It really just affected him mentally." (Ruqya, Group 2)



"Younger kids they have like severe separation anxiety for going back to school or going to school for the first time." (Lien, Group 3)

"That that's one of the things that I observed. Young people, not having enough ways to know how to deal with these problems." (Nestor, Group 3)

"When you look at the kids that came back to school, you can certainly see a difference in education levels." (Wade, Group 4)

"Talking with students, [...] a lot of them experienced a serious lack of consistency. Whether it be consistency of housing, consistency of their education, consistency with family employment, health and that created [...] that underlying feeling of anxiety. [...] They were constantly wondering 'what's next? What's going to happen now?'" (Raymond G, Group 1)

"The people that I communicate with [...], residents who are 65 or older, [...] it affects them a lot because a lot of them were stuck in the house. Not able to see family. And they didn't have the resources." (Shar L., Group 3)

"A lot of kids are cutting themselves thinking of suicide and I've never, ever, ever seen this magnitude of students that are dealing with mental health issues." (Twitty, Group 4)

"I know kids are resilient but it's going to take a long time, I think, for kids really to settle down out of this." (Lisa, Group 4)

Question V. Does the government has a responsibility to step in?

Focus group participants were quick to recognize the responsibility for government to step in and provide support.

"The government should step in to help people. Especially people who are isolated and we cannot get access to resources to help them." (Nestor, Group 3)

"I also agree, I think that the government should step in to provide some sort of like programs for anybody needing any mental help." (Luis, Group 4)

"I'm sure the resources are there, and I think they should step in." (Eric, Group 4)

As mental health and well-being have worsened due to the pandemic, participants emphasized the importance of allocating government resources to educate on, raise awareness of, and address these mounting concerns.

"I think that the pandemic is an extraordinary event globally. So suffice it to say that the government has the responsibility to help people." (Nestor, Group 3)

"I think even pre-pandemic, we were limited on mental health resources, and I think now's the time, more than ever to do that. [...] Why not do something that's been a long time needed and coming?" (Julie C, Group 2)

"You need those resources to be able to identify those things and be educated about those things. What depression looks like, what it doesn't look like." (Twitty, Group 4)



"Parents just think they don't want to get up and clean their rooms, and they're lazy, [...] that's a sign of depression. [...] You don't know what to look for." (Twitty, Group 4)

"The government should step in and provide resources to the schools to people to better educate, to better inform so that people can move forward." (Zoraida, Group 4)

"I think the mental health situation for all people [...] is pretty abysmal. It's always been stigmatized, lack of funding. Maybe one of the good things that can come out of all this mess is that maybe people become more aware." (Lisa, Group 4)

Despite their support, some participants questioned the government's ability to handle mental health services at scale. These participants felt government intervention would be less effective than local community outreach.

"I tend to feel like the more money that comes from the government for services like that, there tend to be additional strings attached, hoops you need to jump through to qualify. [...] Nothing is free." (Raymond, Group 1)

"The government is a cold entity and by that, I mean that they are not like my friends. [...] I would rather us as a community of people [intervene]." (Kirk, Group 1)

"I wouldn't put it one hundred percent on the government and one hundred percent on relying on volunteerism." (Doug, Group 1)

"We tend to know our neighbors, our citizens, our members of our community at a local level, better than at a state government or national government level. I'm not opposed to our tax dollars trickling down to us. [...] [I would like] localized control on how it is used and distributed." (Raymond, Group 1)

Still, the overwhelming majority of focus group participants saw intervention as essential.

Participants also recognized for those less equipped to handle life stressors and challenges, mental health has diminished. Some participants emphasized the importance of early intervention before the mental health challenges worsen.

"Kids [...] are not [...] emotionally developed enough to be able to handle the stressors to the degree that adults can, I think that they do need more help." (Lisa, Group 4)

"We're not trained in mental health, we're just trained to react." (Nicole R, Group 2)

"I definitely do agree that they should step in, especially now, before letting the problems get worse over time, I think, the sooner the better, would be the best way." (Luis, Group 4)

The participants also suggested the government should advertise and raise awareness of services by using social media.

"The best the government could do is provide enough advertising and resources, you know, through television or social media to let people know they have options." (Doug, Group 1)

"Advertising to help people not only know about the services or be able to afford them." (Raymond G, Group 1)



"It's also what platforms, do you give to provide these resources, right? Because everything is social media." (Twitty, Group 4)

"So I do feel like the government should have a huge responsibility in making sure that the message is delivered. Resources are available." (Twitty, Group 4)

"I would assume the city would advertise resources to everyone." (Claro L, Group 1)

By this point in the focus groups, the participants were strongly in favor of government leading efforts to provide supports to the public. They had not yet been asked about Harris County Resources, nor had they proactively named the agency as a solution. The participants recognize the stresses on children and adults, and they support governmental efforts to provide services to people in need – they simply lacked awareness of the services already in place.

Question VI. Reactions to the Explainer Video

Once the need for services was established among participants, an explainer video was shared with the groups. The video presented the services provided by Harris County Resources in the context of "help," and the question – "How can Harris County Resources help you?"

In their initial reactions, not a single participant out of 35 were familiar with Harris County Resources for Children and Adults.

"I've never heard of that." (Kheisha B, Group 2)

"I've never heard of them." (Joey Z, Group 2)

"Is that a real thing?" (Melvin, Group 3)

"Is that unit of the government already available now?" (Nestor, Group 3)

"I didn't even know it existed." (Wade, Group 4)

"My first reaction was like 'Really! We have something like that!'" (Wade, Group 4)

"Why isn't it advertised?" (Phyllis, Group 4)

"I never heard of it." (Eric, Group 4)

"So it's interesting but yeah that's the first time I ever heard of them." (Zoraida, Group 4)

"I didn't know that existed." (Claro L, Group 1)

"Is that like an extension of Health and Human Resources?" (Kirk, Group 1)

"Is it new?" (Rachel E, Group 1)

When provided with a video introducing the agency, the initial response was positive and several participants expressed interest in volunteering and donating.

"That's good to know!" (Tracie C, Group 2)



"We need a big billboard that says 'How Can We Help You?' That would be awesome!" (Joey Z, Group 2)

"First, I was interested like 'Well did they take volunteers?'" (Joey Z, Group 2)

"That's good." (Robert, Group 3)

"I'd never seen it before, but it's great! I wrote it down. I'd never heard of it." (Melvin, Group 3)

"Hopefully open some doors to some people to talk to." (Adam, Group 1)

"Had I known about this resource, I definitely would have reached out. [...] To know that that's available is a good thing." (Tracie, Group 2)

However, due to the lack of familiarity with the agency and previous negative experiences with government "red-tape," focus group participants raised several questions and concerns.

"I'm immediately skeptical because [...] anytime you have to deal with the government, it seems on any level, city, state, local, there are such a mountain of [...] crud to get to where you are going." (Daisy M, Group 2)

"My past dealings with [Harris County] hasn't been too credible. [...] Had to jump through hoops just to even get somebody to talk to you." (Andrew L, Group 2)

"Is this one of those government agencies where there is so much bureaucracy that nothing gets done? [...] That would be my question, like 'how is this going to happen?'" (Rachel, Group 1)

"I work with kids and parents with disabilities, and a lot of times [...] the waiting [list for] the agency is years and years-long." (Nicole R, Group 2)

Participants wanted more information on the services offered, operation and program partnerships, population served, cost of services, agency's founding, and years of operation.

"What kind of resources? What kinds of services?" (Nicole R, Group 2)

"First of all, is this something new? Have they been advertising this? How long has it been going around? Do other people know about it? How is it being advertised?" (Tracie C, Group 2)

"How long have they been in existence?" (Lisa, Group 4)

"Okay children and adults. Does that mean adults take care of children? Is that adults or elderly? [...] What adults are we talking about?" (Clint, Group 3)

"What type of resource?" (Chelsea, Group 3)

"At least identify what types of resources you are providing, because if you say resources, that's broad." (Shar, Group 3)

"Is it through insurance or is this a public service?" (Julie C, Group 2)



Since participants lacked prior awareness of the agency, they were concerned whether a promise made would be a promise kept.

"Since I've never heard of them before, [...] I don't have a lot of faith they would be able to do much more than [...] connect to another, better-funded resource." (Doug, Group 1)

"A lot of those resources on the government level tend to be overwhelmed already." (Julie C, Group 2)

Building Credibility

When asked about what would help establish agency credibility, participant suggestions included: listing agency services and licensed physicians, providing client testimonials and statistics, and showcasing recommendations and partnerships with known and trusted sources and officials.

"What are they offering?" (Ruqya S, Group 2)

"Who are these professionals? Show some names that we can look them up." (Ruqya S, Group 2)

"What agencies are they associated with?" (Nicole R, Group 2)

"I would also say some statistics on what they've done." (Julie C, Group 2)

"Numbers." (Andrew L, Group 2)

"Testimonials!" (Nicole R, Group 2)

"City officials who've talked about it or sitting elected, [...] just people that we know." (Nicole R, Group 2)

When asked about how the information was shared in the video, participants suggested changes, including listing and detailing services, providing the website and phone number (for interested parties to follow up), translating the video into multiple languages with closed captioning, using real-life client testimonials, addressing cost, and illustrating agency services with verbal and visual cues (or bulleting services on screen).

"Detail on what they offer, in terms of services and things. [...] Even if it's just the list of services that pops up onto the screen, at least it gives you some idea, hey this resource is available if I know someone that needs it." (Doug, Group 1)

"More detail on the services." (Claro, Group 1)

"A number and a website probably would have been helpful, some kind of follow up information." (Joey Z, Group 2)

"Phone number or a website." (Doug, Group 1)

"To be inclusive, I think [the video] needs to be in different languages, I think it needs to be closed captioned." (Renee, Group 3)

"Can you show like real people that are actually like using the resources?" (Chelsea, Group 3)



"We haven't really heard any personal anecdotes from folks who may have received support." (Raymond, Group 1)

"Don't just talk about it, but list it like put on like bullet points. [...] Because different people learn different ways, some people may absorbing information visually so many people may absorb the information verbally." (Clint, Group 3)

"They need to include something about payment or cost-wise, because a lot of people see the resources [...] being offered, but how much is it going to cost? A lot of individuals who are low income." (Amanda, Group 3)

In addition to video content, some participants asked about the intended audience.

"Who are you trying to target? What's your target group?" (Twitty, Group 4)

In every focus group, participants believed people rarely seek support when they need it. It is more important to reach those surrounding the people in need so they advocate on their behalf.

"Someone who is close to them, versus someone reaching out on their own to support themselves. [...] Based on my personal experience I've found it's hard to vocalize or to articulate when I need something. It's a lot easier for me to see someone else in need and say 'hey would you like some help with that?' Or say 'hey would you feel comfortable with me making this phone call?'" (Raymond, Group 1)

"You're relying on the family members to do it." (Julie C, Group 2)

"My personal belief is that people who need help, are actually not the ones seeking them. But it's the people who are recommending the help." (Nestor, Group 3)

Participants believe promotional messaging should address a broader public audience who can serve as connectors, rather than focus communications to vulnerable populations.

"Reliance on someone to self-identify a need for help or self-identify a specific thing they do need is a shortfall potentially in the ability to actually provide the services." (Raymond, Group 1)

"I'm the type of person that is like, I'm always trying to reach out and help someone." (Tracie, Group 2)

"That's why I kind of ask like the scope of services being provided. If i knew what was being offered, I would definitely recommend that to parents for more immediate help." (Nicole R, Group 2)

Participants also emphasized the importance of the website - as it is where they would go to evaluate agency credibility and offerings.

"What I always do is go to that website, look at that website to see what they offer what's going on here. [...] Statistics, numbers, you know." (Tracie C, Group 2)

"I think the specifics [...] will hopefully be on the website. What kind of resources they offer, what's the telephone number." (Nestor, Group 3)



"I thought to myself, maybe I should check the website and see what kind of services they provide, or what kind of donations, they might take, how can we help." (Zoraida, Group 4)

"I want to know more about it. Once I get off this, I'm going to look it up." (Kirk, Group 1)

When asked about the video content and style, participants appreciated the message, diversity, and tone.

"I think it could be very powerful if done in the right areas of where it's most needed. I think it can be a powerful video." (Wade, Group 4)

"I really appreciated how much diversity I saw. [...] It helped me feel it was an all-encompassing agency rather than helping one specific population." (Raymond, Group 1)

Question VII. Reactions to Proposed Agency Logos

Participants were also shown three creative iterations for a potential new logo and branding scheme for Harris County Resources.



HARRIS COUNTY
Resources
FOR **Children**
AND **Adults**

LOGO 1



HARRIS COUNTY
RESOURCES
FOR **CHILDREN**
& **ADULTS**

LOGO 2



HARRIS COUNTY
RESOURCES
FOR **CHILDREN**
AND **ADULTS**

LOGO 3

There was little consensus across focus groups on logo preference. Overall, participants felt each logo emphasized a differing agency characteristic. The first logo (figures in hand) illustrated the supportive and caring aspect of the agency, the second logo (re-worked heart logo) signified the unifying and community element, and the third logo (figures holding hands) showed the connective and uplifting agency characteristics.

"From the first one, I get the idea of support as an underlying theme. For the second one, I get the feeling of like coming together and joining. And the third one definitely a theme of connection." (Raymond, Group 1)

"Shape of a heart, you know, two sides come together." (Phyllis, Group 4)

"Personally, I like one. Because of the hand that is holding an adult and a child." (Zoraida, Group 4)

"Three [...] looks fresh." (Wade, Group 4)

"The hand symbolizes help. I like the second one because it's kind of shaped like a heart, and that is symbolic as well." (Rachel, Group 1)

"Two stands out because [...] the unity and the heart and the people." (Itzel, Group 1)

"The second one, you know, as far as more of a community aspect, people standing with you as opposed to taking you somewhere or taking your burden." (Adam, Group 1)

"Number three is more, I guess, modern or cutting edge you don't see it as often." (Nina, Group 3)



"First one with the hand, the helping hand." (Lien, Group 3)

"The hand is a symbol of you know of you're offering." (Nestor, Group 3)

"I like the first one because the held is held out." (Robert, Group 3)

"Logo three is the most distinctive, unique one to me." (Clint, Group 3)

"The heart [is] more intimate." (Daisy M, Group 2)

"I like logo one because the hand the people in the hand makes it look like we're going to take care of you." (Nicole R, Group 2)

These reactions leave agency leadership with a choice in terms of the principles and values they want to see reflected in the creative direction for the future.

In terms of color, all of the groups tended to prefer the green, blue, and orange color schemes.

"I think the orange helps draw the eye a bit more." (Julie, Group 2)





Question VII. Participant Recommendations

At the close of the focus group discussions, participants were asked to come up with messaging ideas and pitches for the agency to increase awareness and carry the brand.

These participant pitches built off the earlier group discussions and highlighted different aspects of the agency's role and mission. The participant suggestions also touched on tangible concerns – like agency integrity, service costs, and ways of following up (website and phone number).

"Life gets tough. You don't have to go through this alone. [...] Contact us at the website and phone number." (Luis, Group 4)

"We provide resources and connections to assist children and adults in need. From at-risk youth to [adults with] disabilities to [senior] adults who need an extra hand [...]. Our staff will listen and connect you, to the best fitting agency for your individual needs and we strive to provide resources that will be available soon as possible, not a years-long waiting list." (Julie C, Group 2)

"You're not alone anymore we're here to be with you. [...] We're not just here to help, we're here to be with you." (Joey Z, Group 2)

"Do you or someone hopeless or helpless need help? Harris County has an organization that will welcome you with open arms, regardless of who you are. It's community-driven, statistics-backed services provided for anyone who needs it, driven by love and powered by those around you." (Juan, Group 2)

"Help is free. It's called Harris County Resources for Children and Adults" (Nestor, Group 3)

"Harris County Resources for Children and Adults is a free service for people who are struggling with any life event. From mental health to financial difficulties, give them a call and someone will be there to help you with open arms. You no longer need to go through it alone." (Lien, Group 3)

"If you're in need Harris County is ready and here to help. For a listing of our services, please check our website at that up or call us at." (Lisa, Group 4)

"Help guide children and adults in Harris County to get back to their feet mentally, physically, and spiritually." (Group 4)

"Resources is an agency you can trust. Every background is welcome." (Itzel, Group 1)

"HCRCA focuses on those who may not have advocates for themselves. The youngest and the oldest in the population and the most vulnerable." (Doug, Group 1)

"Bringing resources together for the people." (Claro, Group 1)

There aren't easy solutions for an agency like Harris County Resources, which provides a spectrum of services across the life span of County residents, but the components of the messaging suggestions from everyday people are a reflection of their interests and concerns. Including some of these frames into ongoing communications will help promote the agency to the public.



CONCLUSION

The public is ready to support Resources' mission and work. Harris County residents understand the real pressures confronting people across the County and believe the government should lead.

While these four focus groups are not fully representative of Harris County's diversity, they offer a sobering perspective about the need for the services Harris County Resources provides - and the unfortunate lack of public awareness of the agency's work.

Despite this lack of awareness, Harris County residents appreciate the need for intervention and prevention services.

To build recognition and credibility, Harris County Resources must define the agency and its services to a broader audience by sharing credentials, statistics, and testimonials.

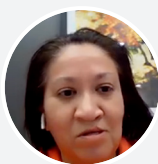
By promoting its services on popular media platforms, the agency will earn broader support and recognition for its work, leaving Harris County residents in a better position to flourish, prosper, and thrive.



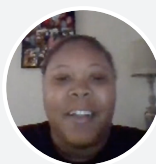


LIST OF FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

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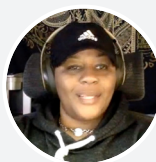
Nina R.
46 years old
Kashmere Garden



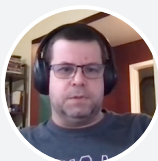
Chelsea M.
28 years old
Kashmere Garden



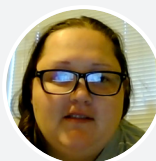
Melvin S.
54 years old
Willows



Shar L.
53 years old
Greensbrook Community



Clint J.
42 years old
Meyerland



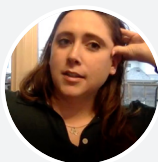
Amanda G.
35 years old
Bayou Oaks



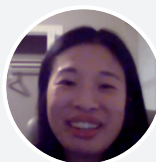
Robert B.
50 years old
Glenwood Forest



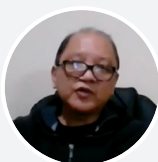
Vivian M.
69 years old
Willow Meadows



Tessa H.
28 years old
Rice Military



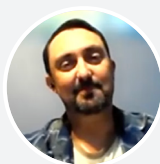
Lien B.
30 years old
North Macgregor Terrace



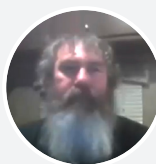
Nestor C.
60 years old
North West



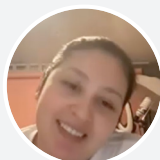
Precinct 2



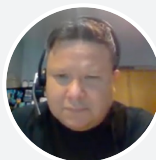
Raymond G.
45 years old
Middlebrook



Kirk M.
60 years old
Woodgate



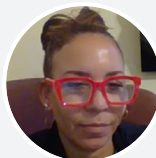
Itzel J.
26 years old
Northline



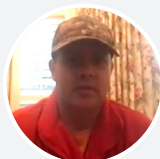
Claro L.
50 years old
Harrisburg



Adam A.
34 years old
Brookglen



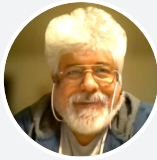
Rachel E.
51 years old
Riviera East



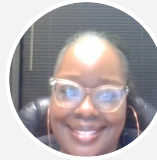
Doug T.
44 years old
Autumn Creek



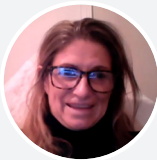
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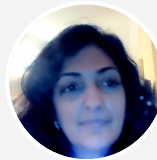
Joey Z.
62 years old
Northern Point



Kheisha B.
47 years old
Copper Grove



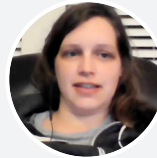
Daisy M.
46 years old
Prestonwood



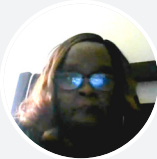
Ruqya S.
44 years old
Windermere



Andrew L.
39 years old
Memorial Northwest Estates



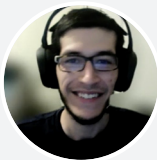
Julie C.
27 years old
Cypress, Bridgeland



Tracie C.
59 years old
Cottage Gardens



Nicole R.
51 years old
Canyon Lakes Village



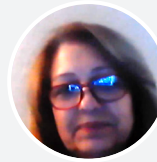
Juan B.
26 years old
Villages of Cypress Lakes-
West



Precinct 4



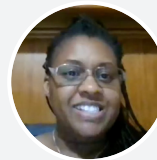
Eric B.
34 years old
Briar Grove



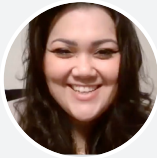
Zoraida R.
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West Memorial



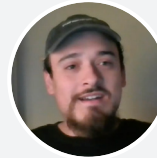
Wade S.
55 years old
Village Creek



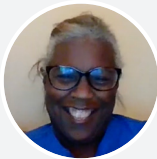
Twitty C.
45 years old
Silver Ranch



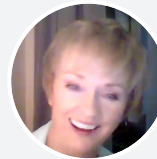
Chun-Ting O.
38 years old
Walnut Bend



Luis R.
28 years old
Westchase



Phyllis R.
66 years old
Alief



Lisa G.
56 years old
Deerfield Village

RESEARCH OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Harris County Resources occupies sensitive terrain.

Not everyone who needs services offered by the agency will want other people to know they or a family member are receiving those services, or acknowledge they have been harmed or led astray by a family member or person they trust. The agency, therefore, faces a much more significant burden in cultivating trust and awareness to get members of the public to take the first step.

This requires “softening” messaging and promoting successful and positive outcomes.

Brands are more than names, logos, and taglines. Brands are what people experience and relate to each other.

Finding “ambassadors” – individuals, their families, and service partners – who are willing to validate the work of the agency based on their personal experiences will be an essential component of messaging. Using video content, in concert with a comprehensive update of the agency website and social media presence, will help tell a more effective story, and build credibility.

Brands also build over time – and through effective work and positive experiences, Harris County Resources will cultivate an experience-based brand promoted by word of mouth and organic social media.



Update The Resources Website

The Harris County Resources for Children and Adults website is the central element of its branding assets. An effective website lends the agency credibility, establishes the brand, and expands awareness, which will ultimately increase the number of people assisted by the agency.

People frequently visit a website before connecting with a service. Public engagement and outreach efforts drive interested parties to the website to gain additional information and seek resources.

To successfully integrate interested parties into Harris County Resources, the website must function as a resource.

Due to the sensitive role of Resources, clear, digestible, and approachable language intended for the target audience is key.

The agency must create a clear path to services, incorporate inspirational testimonials, include statistics, highlight next steps and call-to-action points (applications, toolkits, online forms, phone numbers, etc.), and limit complicated programmatic acronyms.

By building a more accommodating website, the agency can increase measurable outcomes. Site changes will allow the number of toolkit downloads, application submissions, and forms completed to become quantifiable ways Harris County Resources for Children and Adults can measure progress.



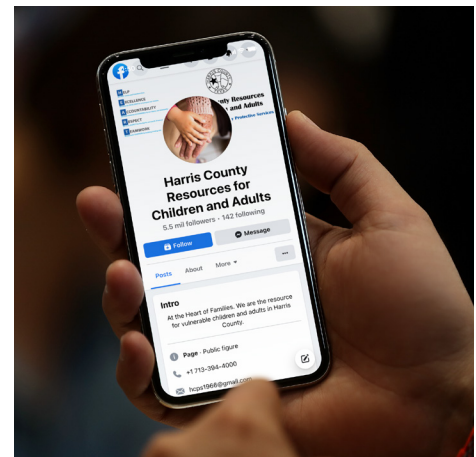
Grow The Social Media Presence And Engagement

Once a newly developed website has been established, the agency can leverage digital marketing and organic content to increase awareness of the services it provides to the public.

Social media plays an essential role in how people discover, research, and share information online. With [72 percent of all Americans](#) on social media, no public agency can completely meet its mission without establishing a social presence.

To supplement ongoing community engagement efforts within Harris County Resources, utilizing digital platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, etc.) will increase awareness. Harris County Resources needs an updated and unified social media presence, employing these platforms to illustrate the agency “wins” with testimonials and uplifting explanations of its many services.

While the social media strategy will start with organic posts, once a digital footprint has been established, Harris County Resources should engage with online groups (parents, schools, senior centers, civic clubs, neighborhood associations, etc.), and consider utilizing paid digital media campaigns to further extend agency reach and awareness.





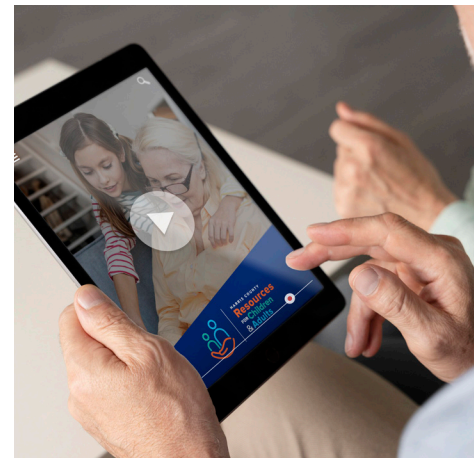
Use Videos To Tell The Resources Story

The multiple programs and populations the agency serves has, in the past, complicated internal and external understanding and recognition of the agency. A public introduction (or reintroduction) of Harris County Resources begins with the agency telling its own story.

An explainer video will provide Harris County Resources with a way to define its brand and clarify services to the public. The video format allows the agency to describe itself and its mission in an informative, accessible, and engaging manner.

Video can also counterbalance the negative media attention and general public discomfort and misunderstanding about the agency. This is especially possible if Harris County Resources leverages video testimonials from people the agency has helped to illustrate agency “wins” and establish a new narrative.

Further, the visual assets used in the video help foster brand recognition by associating the agency with the newly developed brand colors and messaging.



Align Staff On Service Offerings

The interviews revealed inconsistent or incomplete understanding of the full set of services the agency offers to the public. Consistent message training and guidance will align staff across programs, and facilitate a uniform agency brand.

Staff education should emphasize and illuminate all of the services provided by Harris County Resources and establish ways in which programs can coordinate and communicate moving forward. This will create inter-agency connectivity, link experts within the organization, and minimize programmatic silos.

Staff should also be guided on the best ways to introduce the agency, and how to talk about the agency’s services, rather than limiting their engagement to their individual programs.



Expand Press And Media Outreach

The interviews affirmed the importance of developing staff competencies in media relations and taking advantage of press opportunities to increase public awareness and involvement.

Harris County Resources’ staff needs the proper tools to speak about their specific program and the agency as a whole with the news media, to assert themselves and the agency as experts in the field.

Staff preparation will allow the agency to be responsive to immediate news coverage. The agency can gain positive media attention by presenting its leaders as experts across its spectrum of services, which will help bolster trust for the agency.





Leverage User Experience To Drive Brand Perception

The strongest brands have been cultivated through positive user experiences. People use a service, have a positive experience, and share it with others. The risk organizations face as they grow is they cannot effectively meet the increased demand resulting from heightened awareness or continue to deliver the quality people have been told to expect.

Broader public awareness will increase pressure on the agency's capacity. To ensure Harris County Resources can service people at the scale of Harris County, the agency has to identify where referrals are coming from, understand where the future needs will be, and prepare to align internal resources to meet the potential for greater demand arising out of greater public awareness.

Allocating resources to the necessary programs and services will allow the agency to meet demand with quality experiences, and to then optimize services to best meet community needs. The positive experiences these people then have will be strengthen the Harris County Resources brand and make agency distinctions or confusion a thing of the past.



Optimize How People Find Resources (SEO)

As a final step in establishing agency brand and public awareness, Harris County Resources has to build its brand authority through Search Engine Optimization (SEO) strategies.

Search Engine Optimization will increase visibility and recognition, by making the agency easier to find online when people search for assistance. The best way to describe SEO it when people search for services without using any of the words in the agency's name "Harris County Resources for Children and Adults," the agency is still listed as a top search result.

SEO includes several approaches, including embedding relevant keywords in your pages, incorporating link-building strategies, and optimizing the site for local geography searches.



Conclusion

Harris County Resources for Children and Adults is on its way to establishing itself as an essential contributor to a stronger Harris County.

By broadly marketing its services and delivering on the promises the agency makes, Harris County Resources will help people improve their lives and find the help they need.



APPENDICES



TABLE OF AUTHORITIES



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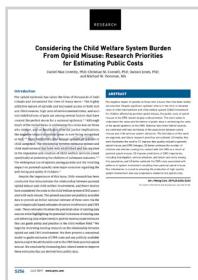
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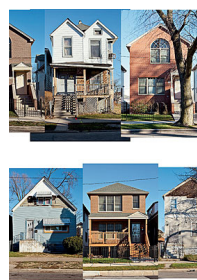
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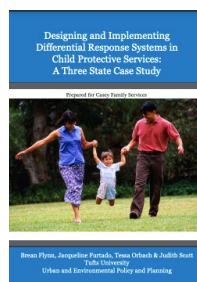
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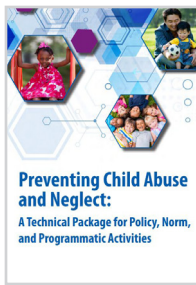
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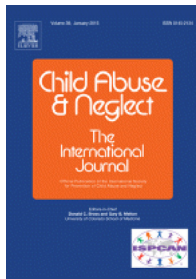
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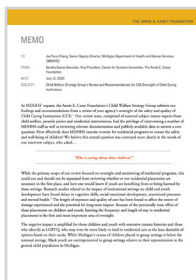
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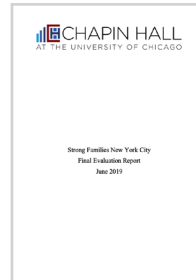
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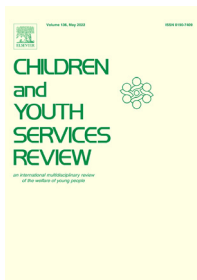
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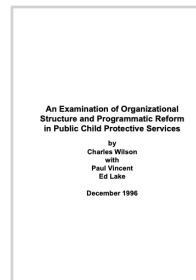
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