



Atascosa County Sexual Assault Response
Team

2025 SART Biennial Report

Report Completed: December 1, 2025

Contact Information:

Safer Path Family Violence Shelter, Inc.

Rhonda Williamson, Executive Director

RWilliamson@saferpathfvs.org | 830-569-2001

2025 SART Biennial Report

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Executive Summary

In 2021, Texas passed a law requiring every county to form a Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) to improve how communities respond to adult sexual assault. These teams bring together law enforcement, prosecutors, healthcare providers, and advocates to ensure victims receive timely, compassionate, and coordinated care. Research shows that communities with active SARTs have better outcomes for survivors and stronger accountability for offenders.

Atascosa County's SART was established in 2022 and has met regularly since then. Over the past three years, we have created county-wide protocols, trained professionals, collected data, and reviewed a complete case to identify what works and what needs improvement. This report covers progress from 2023 to 2025 and reflects on four years of data. The findings confirm the need for a consistent, trauma-informed approach across all agencies, so survivors feel safe coming forward and seeking justice.

While this report focuses heavily on statistics, I want to take a moment to remind each of you reading this report that these statistics are more than numbers. Each case reported here represents one of the most traumatic experiences a person can have. After working with survivors for the last 25+ years, "victim" or "survivor" – are extraordinarily difficult ideas to integrate into your identity. No one is ever prepared to step into this unwanted role. As we review this data, please remember the human beings behind the numbers

Our SART's goal for the next two years is clear: strengthen collaboration, expand training, and ensure every survivor receives the same level of care and respect. While this report includes statistics, we never forget that behind every number is a person whose life has been deeply impacted. Together, we can continue building a safer, more supportive community.

This report will be submitted to Atascosa County Commissioners Court and Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA) on December 1.

Thank you,



Rhonda Williamson Executive Director
Safer Path Family Violence Shelter, Inc.

Thank you, Carissa Futterer, from TxFNE for going above and beyond to support the creation of this report. She created a beautiful template that provided the structure for this report and helped us prepare for Case Review.



SART Overview

The Atascosa County SART is held bimonthly, and the following individuals are in attendance:

Primary SART Members, designated by law:

Imelda Gomez, Advocacy Manager, Safer Path Family Violence Shelter, Inc.

Andrea Rathmell, Education Manager, Safer Path Family Violence Shelter, Inc.

Carissa Futterer, MSN, RN, SANE-A, SANE-P, CA-CP SANE, Clinical Manager, Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners: Forensic Center of Excellence

Erika Price, Assistant District Attorney – Atascosa County, 81st District Attorney's Office

Jonathan Fisher, Attorney, Atascosa County Attorney's Office

John Strause, Sgt. Investigator, Atascosa County Sheriff's Office

CJ Zoeller, Detective, Jourdanton Police Department

Jordan Haran, Lieutenant, Pleasanton Police Department

William Permenter, Corporal, Poteet Police Department

Jesusita "Susie" Soto, Atascosa Clinic Manager, Camino Real Community Services

SART Member Agency Leads

Rhonda Williamson, Executive Director, Safer Path Family Violence Shelter, Inc.

Khara Breeden, DNP, MS, RN, SANE-A, SANE-P, AFN-BC, Founder & CEO, Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners: Forensic Center of Excellence

Audrey Gossett Louis, District Attorney, 81st District Attorney's Office

Molly Solis, County Attorney, Atascosa County Attorney's Office

Jake Guerra, Sheriff, Atascosa County Sheriff's Office

Santos Gonzales, Chief, Jourdanton Police Department

Ernest Guerra, Chief, Pleasanton Police Department

Rex Newman, Interim Chief, Poteet Police Department

Veronia Sanchez, Executive Director, Camino Real Community Services

Additional Invited SART Members

Megan L. Garcia, M.Ed., LPC, ADHD-PT, Owner/Therapist, Atascosa Counseling & Consultation Services

Ariane Bauer, BSN, RN, Chief Operating Officer, Bluebird's Hope Inc.

Summary of Activities and Trainings of SART

Meetings were held on the following dates:

11/17/23	9/20/24	6/20/25
12/15/23	11/15/24	10/17/25
2/16/24	1/17/25	
4/19/24	3/21/25	

Meetings are facilitated by a Safer Path staff member, and have been attended by the following people:

SART Attendees FY24			
First Name	Last Name	Agency	Title
Audrey	Louis	81st District Attorney's Office	District Attorney
Erika	Price	81st District Attorney's Office	Assistant District Attorney
Katie	Quinney	81st District Attorney's Office	Victim Advocate Coordinator
Megan	Garcia	Atascosa Counseling & Consultation Services	Therapist
Robbie	Denson	Atascosa County Attorney Office	Assistant
Polly	Filson	Atascosa County Attorney Office	VAC
Albert	Garza	Atascosa County Sheriff's Office	Sgt. Investigator
Arianne	Bauer	Bluebird's Hope	COO
Chrystal	Schwerdtfeger	Bluebird's Hope	CEO
Jesse	Martinez	Charlotte Police Department	Captain
Courtney	Grier	Emergency Medical Services	EMS Director
Carissa	Futterer	Methodist Hospital System	Sane Program Coordinator
Daniel	Zertuche	Pleasanton ISD Police Department	Officer
Amelia	Garza	Pleasanton Police Department	Detective
Gabriel	Garza	Pleasanton Police Department	Detective
Jordan	Haren	Pleasanton Police Department	Lieutenant
Chris	Trevino	Pleasanton Police Department	Detective
Willie	Mendez	Poteet ISD Police Department	Chief
Bruce	Hickman	Poteet Police Department	Chief
Noe	Rodriguez	Poteet Police Department	Lieutenant
Adriana	Alvarado	Safer Path Family Violence Shelter	Grant Coordinator
Imelda	Gomez	Safer Path Family Violence Shelter	Advocacy Service Manager
Kat	Pyles	Safer Path Family Violence Shelter	Sexual Assault Advocate
Laya	Ramos	Safer Path Family Violence Shelter	Client Coordinator
Cindy	Rodriguez	Safer Path Family Violence Shelter	Shelter Service Manager
Amanda	Villarreal	Safer Path Family Violence Shelter	Deputy Director
Rhonda	Williamson	Safer Path Family Violence Shelter	Executive Director

SART Attendees FY25

First Name	Last Name	Agency	Title
Audrey	Louis	81st District Attorney's Office	District Attorney
Erika	Price	81st District Attorney's Office	Assistant District Attorney
Ryan	Wright	81st District Attorney's Office	Assistant District Attorney
Megan	Garcia	Atascosa Counseling & Consultation Services	Therapist
Valerie	Campos	Atascosa County Adult Probation	Chief
Lara	Tristian	Atascosa County Adult Probation	Unit Manager
Dolly	Denson	Atascosa County Attorneys Office	Assistant
Monica	Guillen	Atascosa County Attorneys Office	Victim Advocate
Molly	Solis	Atascosa County Attorneys Office	County Attorney
Albert	Garza	Atascosa County Sheriff's Office	Sgt. Investigator
Arianne	Baver	Bluebird's Hope	Chief Operating Officer
Laci	Booker	Bluebird's Hope	Forensic Nurse Examiner
Crystal	Schwerdtfeger	Bluebird's Hope	Forensic Nurse
Jesusita	Soto	Camino Real Community Service	Clinic Manager
Harmony	Ratterree	City of Pleasanton	Council Member
Yvette	Estrada	Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime	Senior Advisor
Courtney	Grier	Emergency Medical Services	Director
Santos	Gonzalez	Jourdanton Police Department	Chief
CJ	Zoeller	Jourdanton Police Department	Detective
Felix	Herrera	Justice of the Peace Precinct #1	Judge
Russell	Prasifka	Justice of the Peace Precinct #4	Judge
Amelia	Garza	Pleasanton Police Department	Detective
Gabriel	Garza	Pleasanton Police Department	CID
Jordan	Haren	Pleasanton Police Department	Lieutenant
Anastacio	Perez	Pleasanton Police Department	Assistant Chief
Chris	Trevino	Pleasanton Police Department	Detective
Rex	Newman	Poteet Police Department	Chief
William	Permenter	Poteet Police Department	Corporal
Adriana	Alvarado	Safer Path Family Violence Shelter	Grant Coordinator
Mikayla	Dominguez	Safer Path Family Violence Shelter	Community Educator
Imelda	Gomez	Safer Path Family Violence Shelter	Advocacy Service Manager
Jennifer	Mills	Safer Path Family Violence Shelter	Sexual Assault Advocate
Andrea	Rathmell	Safer Path Family Violence Shelter	Community Educator Manager
Amanda	Villarreal	Safer Path Family Violence Shelter	Deputy Director
Cheyenne	Vytlecka	Safer Path Family Violence Shelter	Community Engagement Coordinator
Rhonda	Williamson	Safer Path Family Violence Shelter	Executive Director
Sumer	Woodson	Safer Path Family Violence Shelter	Advocate

Khara	Breeden	Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners: The Forensic Center of Excellence (TXFNE)	Chief Executive Officer
Rebecca	Broussard	Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners: The Forensic Center of Excellence (TXFNE)	Nurse
Carra	Crouch	Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners: The Forensic Center of Excellence (TXFNE)	Forensic Nurse
Brookley	Delbosque	Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners: The Forensic Center of Excellence (TXFNE)	Chief Operating Officer
Carissa	Futterer	Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners: The Forensic Center of Excellence (TXFNE)	Clinical Manager

From 2023 to 2025, the SART conducted the following cross-trainings:

Date	Presentation/Topic	Presenter
11/17/2023	Lethality Assessment Protocol Overview-TCFV	Sarah Hilderbrand- TCFV
11/15/2024	Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Response Hotline Training	Safer Path Family Violence Shelter
8/15/2025	Strangulation	Carissa Futterer- Texas FNE

The SART will meet quarterly in 2026 and will focus on cross-training all partners on how to best respond to sexual assault. This coming year's trainings will be:

Month	Training Topic	Presenter
January	Adult Probation Dept. Overview	Valerie Compos- Unit Manager 81st CSCD
April	Mental Health in Crisis	Megan Garcia, Atascosa Counseling Services
July	Forensic Examinations	Carissa Futterer- Texas FNE
October	Offender Criminal History	Erika Price, 81st DA Office
November	Dynamics of Sexual Assault	Safer Path

Data and Findings

All data below is from September 1, 2023 to August 31, 2025. This represents two fiscal years, each starting September 1 to August 31. The data for September 1, 2023 to August 31, 2024 is labeled in the tables below as FY2024. The data for September 1, 2024 to August 31, 2025 is labeled in the tables below as FY2025.

Healthcare Provider Data

Bluebird's Hope, Inc. (BH) has provided forensic nursing examinations to individuals who have experienced sexual assault, strangulation, domestic violence, and/or human trafficking to underserved and rural areas since 2020.

Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners: Forensic Center of Excellence (TxFNE) launched to provide services in the Southwest Texas region on November 3rd, 2024. Prior to the launch of the program, survivors from Atascosa County routinely received medical forensic care at Methodist Hospital | Specialty and Transplant (MHST) in San Antonio, Texas. The Sexual Assault Program at MHST closed on November 2nd, 2024. Examination data from that location is not accessible to any current SART team members.

	FY 2024	FY 2025	Description or Interesting Note
BH	1	2	
TxFNE	0	11	This provided did not serve this region until 11/3/24
MHST			Program closed 11/2/24. Data is not accessible.

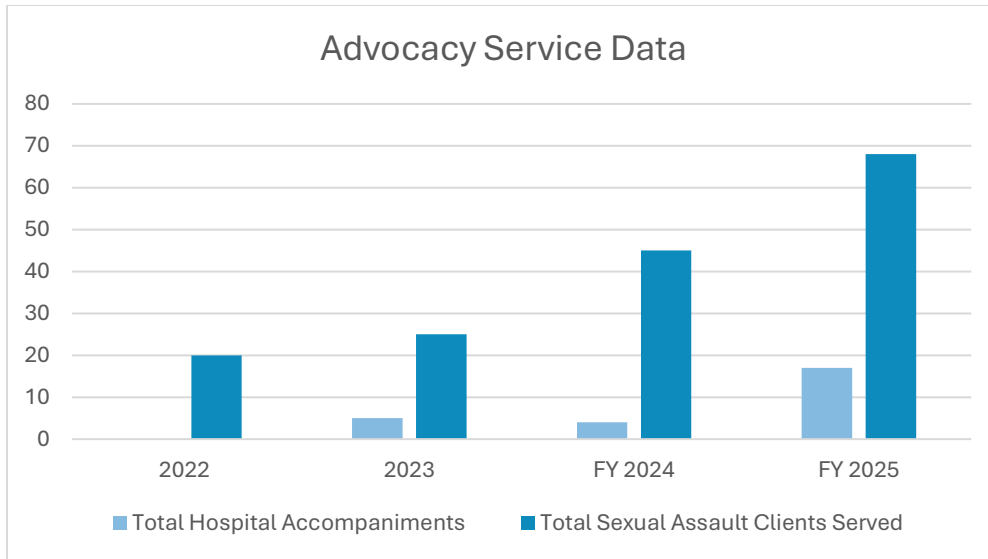
This data was not collected in the 2023 Biennial Report. We do not have comparable data to demonstrate in a chart because of this.

Advocacy Data

Open since 1992, Safer Path Family Violence Shelter offers free and confidential support to anyone impacted by sexual violence through 24/7/365 hotline and shelter. All calls are answered by a trained advocate and are completely anonymous and confidential.

Safer Path provides adult survivors of sexual violence and their loved ones with an immediate, supportive response to reduce distress, create stability, empower victims, and support survivors' healing.

	2022	2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	Description or Interesting Note
Total Hospital Accompaniments	0	5	4	17	TxFNE & Blue Bird's Hope began providing forensic exams locally in 2023.
Total Sexual Assault Clients Served	20	25	45	68	We received funding to provide expanded sexual assault services for FY23-25.



As demonstrated in the chart above, Safer Path has seen a significant increase in the number of sexual assault survivors served over the last four years. Our partnerships with TxFNE and Blue Bird's Hope that allow survivors to be served by a Forensic Nurse in their own community has made a significant difference in the number of survivors willing to undergo a forensic exam. Safer Path provided more medical accompaniments to forensic exams in FY25 than in the entire previous 10 years combined. There is a clear need for sexual assault support services in Atascosa County. Safer Path received funding to expand and enhance our sexual assault services for Fy23-25. This funding was eliminated October 2025. This cut has reduced our advocacy capacity by 20%.

Investigating Law Enforcement Data

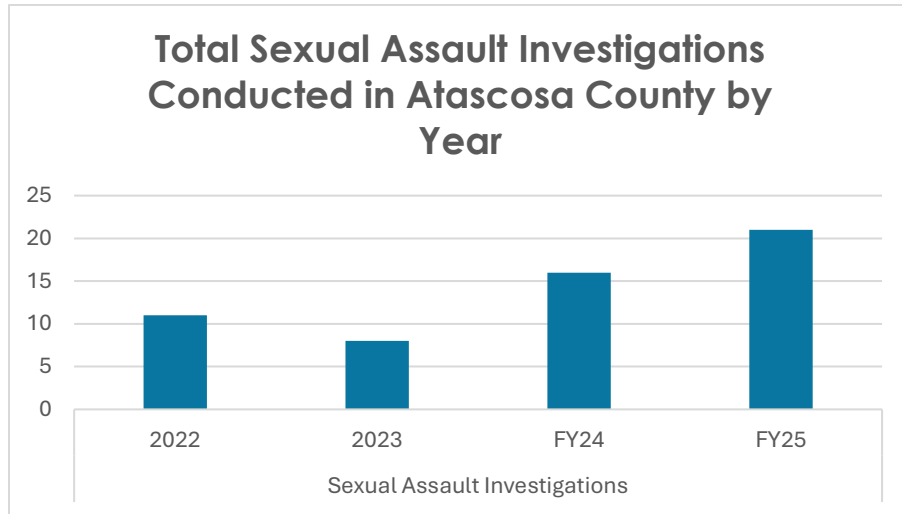
Each of the law enforcement organizations participating in the Atascosa County SART were asked to provide the SART with information about the number of sexual assault reports their agency received in the year, the number of sexual assault investigations conducted in the year, as well as the number of rape kits their agency left uncollected past the statutory time line for kits to be sent to the lab. The table and graphs below show the changes that have occurred over the last four years. It is worth celebrating that all of our local law enforcement officers understand the importance of rape kit evidence, and respect that the survivor provided this evidence. Everyone has transported rape kits to the crime lab in a timely manner.

Each law enforcement agency was also asked about the number of indictments presented in connection with a report and the disposition of that indictment. The goal of collecting this data is so that our community can more easily see what happens between investigation and prosecution.

Law Enforcement Organization	Sexual Assault Reports/Calls				Sexual Assault Investigations				Rape Kits Past Statutory Time				Case Disposition	
	2022	2023	FY24	FY25	2022	2023	FY24	FY25	2022	2023	FY24	FY25	FY24	FY25
Atascosa County Sheriff's Office	15	4	9	12	11	4	9	12	NA	NA	0	0	3 mislabeled (child sex assaults, will be corrected) 2 unfounded (mental health reporter) 3 uncooperating victim/victim recant/victim has not shown up to provide statement 1 victim could not identify suspect (possible mental health)	3 mislabeled (child sex assaults, will be corrected) 2 unfounded (mental health reporter) 1 no corroborating evidence or unfounded 5 pending/open cases 1 presented to Grand Jury - No Billed
Jourdanton Police Department	0	0	5	5	0	0	5	4*	NA	NA	0	0	3 cases were mislabeled (child sex assaults, will be corrected) 2 cases were investigated and closed due to lack of cooperation from victim	3 cases were mislabeled (child sex assaults, will be corrected) 1 Case was investigated, but has not been submitted to DA as of yet.

Pleasanton Police Department	0	0	1	2	0	4	0*	2	NA	NA	0	0	Case was not investigated because the victim refused to cooperate. Case was closed	1 Case pending review by the DA 1 Case rejected by the DA
Poteet Police Department	0	4	2	5	0	0	2	5	NA	NA	0	0	1 Suspect not charged. Victim refused to cooperate. 1 Currently being prosecuted at County Attorney's office.	1 Referred to ACSO as assault occurred outside city limits. 1 Suspect not charged due to Investigator and County Attorney decision 1 Case still under investigation. Suspect not charged yet because victim not cooperating. 1 Suspect not charged. Victim refused to cooperate 1 Suspects not charged. Currently under review with County Attorney
Total:	15	8	17	23	11	8	16	21	NA	NA	0	0		

To help illustrate the data, the four-year history of the number of investigations conducted by county law enforcement agencies is presented in a graph below.



The shifts in this data indicate that by working together as a SART, we have created consistency in how these cases are reported. Overall, there are more sexual assaults being reported to all law enforcement organizations in the past two years than there were in the previous two years.

District Attorney's Office Data

The 81st Judicial District Attorney's office was asked to provide the number of indictments presented in connection with a report and the disposition of the case, as well as the number of reports of a sexual assault which no indictment was presented or No Billed by the Grand Jury.

	FY24	FY25	Description or Interesting Note
Number of indictments presented in connection with a report and the disposition	0	1	1 indicted, plead to other charge 1 referred by JPD – refused 1 referred by ACSO – pending review (occurred in FY 2024, and turned in to us during FY 2025)
The number of reports of a sexual assault which no indictment was presented or No Billed by the Grand Jury.	1	1	1 presented – No bill (ACSO) 1 indicted (ACSO) – dismissed with plea to other charges. V uncooperative. 1 pending review – Pleasanton PD 1 refused – Pleasanton PD (not included originally bc of how charge was labeled).

2025 SART Protocols

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Section 1: Acknowledgements, Introductions & Background, Member Roles & Definitions

We would like to extend our appreciation to the participating agencies who provided representation on the Sexual Assault Response Team during the creation and publication of this document. We would like to specifically thank those listed below. Their dedicated services and collaborate efforts have been essential in providing comprehensive support and care for survivors of sexual assault.

SART Members who assisted in the creation of the protocol

81st District Attorney's Office

Audrey Gossett Louis, **District Attorney**

Erika Price, **Assistant District Attorney – Atascosa County**

Katie Quinney, **Victim Advocate**

Atascosa County Sheriff's Office

Jake Guerra, **Sheriff**

Albert Garza, **Administrative Seargent**

John Strause, **Sgt. Investigator**

Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners: Forensic Center of Excellence

Dr. Khara Breeden, **Founder and CEO**

Carissa Futterer, **Clinical Manager**

Safer Path Safer Path Family Violence Shelter, Inc.

Rhonda Williamson, **Executive Director**

Andrea Rathmell, **Education Manager**

Hays County Sexual Assault Response Team

For serving as an example and supporting the development of an exceptional and beautiful protocol and biannual report.

A large, elegant, handwritten-style cursive script that reads "Thank you". The letters are fluid and connected, with a classic, slightly formal feel. The "T" and "Y" are particularly prominent and decorative.

Introduction & Background

To create systems that are sensitive and responsive to needs of survivors, Senate Bill 476 was passed during the 87th Texas Legislature and became law, effective September 1, 2021. This law requires that all of the Texas counties establish multidisciplinary adult sexual assault response teams. The response team is responsible for development a county or region-wide interagency protocol (Tex.Loc.Gov't Code 351.256(b)).

Chapter 351, Subchapter J required the County Judge to appoint representation of the SART.

The Atascosa County Commissioners' Court appointed the following statutory members:

- 1. The chief administrator, or the chief administrator's designee, of a Sexual Assault Program that provides services for the county:**

Rhonda Williamson, **Executive Director, Safer Path Family Violence Shelter**

- 2. A prosecutor with jurisdiction in the county over cases involving sexual assault committed against adults:**

Audrey Louis, **District Attorney, 81st Judicial District Attorney's Office**

- 3. The chief, or the chief's designee, of the municipal police department with the largest population of the county, provided a municipality in the county has a municipal police department:**

Ernest Guerra, **Chief, Pleasanton Police Department YZ**

- 4. The sheriff, or the sheriff's designee:**

Jake Guerra, **Sheriff, Atascosa County Sheriff's Office**

- 5. A sexual assault nurse examiner or forensic examiner from a facility that conducts sexual assault forensic exams for the county; or a representative from the largest healthcare provider operating in the county if the county does not have a sexual assault nurse examiner or forensic examiner from a facility that conducts sexual assault forensic exams:**

Dr. Khara Breeden, **Founder and CEO, Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners: Forensic Center of Excellence**

- 6. A behavioral health services provider operating in the county, or if the county does not have a behavioral health services provider, a representative from the county health department:**

Veronica A. Sanchez, **Executive Director, Camino Real Community Services**

- 7. Other persons the presiding officer of the response team considers necessary for the operation of the response team or as recommended by the response team:**

Courtney Grier, **Director, Atascosa County Emergency Medical Services**

**The professionals specifically named above are the minimum team membership required by law. Each SART is able to appoint additional members as needed.*

The SART in Atascosa County exhibits a strong commitment to addressing the challenges faced by survivors of sexual assault. The team actively engages in the development of solutions to overcome the many obstacles face by rural survivors. The primary focus of the SART involves fostering collaboration among diverse teams, including law enforcement, prosecutors, healthcare professionals, victim services and crisis centers, all united in their dedication to providing unwavering support to survivors.

This protocol was developed to ensure seamless coordination among all participating agencies in cases involving sexual assault. Its core objectives are to enhance the efficiency of response efforts and to minimize the potential for re-traumatization of survivors. This protocol was developed in close collaboration with essential SART team members, incorporating the latest insights from trauma-informed and victim-centered approaches. This biennial report outlines Atascosa County's SART protocols, defines the roles and responsibilities of each agency, and establishes a clear framework through which these agencies collaborate to ensure the most effective support for survivors while navigating the complex landscape of adult sexual assault cases. The Atascosa County SART is committed to empowering survivors, promoting justice and paving the way for a safer community.

This protocol is made available to various law enforcement and treatment providers throughout Atascosa County. We seek for this protocol to be inclusive of all member voices and incorporate survivors' voices and experiences. It will supplement individual agency policies and procedures. The SART will review and update the protocol a minimum of once every two (2) years. In developing the protocols, the team shall consider Chapter 56A, Code of Criminal Procedure.

Mission Statement

The Atascosa County SART seeks to create a consistent, respectful, victim-centered, trauma-informed coordinated response to adult victims of sexual assault. We do this through multi-disciplinary training, collaboration, communication, and a shared commitment to continuous improvement. Grounded in the shared principles of treating all people with dignity, fairness, and respect, the SART seeks to create a community where everyone who has experiences sexual assault is allowed to move from victim to survivor.

Vision Statement

Atascosa County is a community where all survivors of sexual assault are believed and supported, and offenders are held accountable.

SART Goals

- **Provide on-going training to all professionals connected with a victim of sexual assault to ensure a consistent, reliable, victim-centered response from all SART agency members.**

The SART has identified that each member agency needs training on: victim behavior, the impact of victim bias, the dynamics of sexual assault, how to provide courtroom testimony, tracking reports from other organizations, trauma-informed interviewing, using body-cams to get the best statement from the victim at first response, and working together across jurisdictions.

- **Provide education to the community on how to respond to and refer someone who has disclosed a sexual assault.**

The SART has identified that survivors may choose various avenues to initially disclose a sexual assault, including through law enforcement, medical facilities, crisis centers, or confiding in family and friends. Given this multitude of entry points, the SART has set one of its primary goals as educating not only its member partners, but also the broader community. The team will achieve this through tabling events, educational presentations, prevention initiatives, and continued training provided through SART. Through their continuous efforts, the SART believes that increasing community awareness about this issue can significantly influence a survivor's decision-making process as they consider how to proceed, and can help reshape the mindset of the community around victim blaming. This will help improve judicial outcomes in the long-term as every community member is a potential juror.

- **Secure timely access to medical forensic examinations for all survivors.**

Rural survivors and crisis centers have encountered difficulties in locating a Forensic Nurse Examiner (FNE) to conduct forensic SAFE examinations for years. The Atascosa County SART is dedicated to addressing this challenge by assisting survivors in access to care. We collaborate with various providers, including Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners: Forensic Center of Excellence, Methodist Hospital | Atascosa, The Southwest Texas Regional Advisory Council (STRAC), Blue Bird's Hope, and others to facilitate these exams. Additionally, members of the Atascosa County SART recognize the right of an adult victim of a sexual violence to have a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam, regardless of when the assault occurred. This practice has been codified in the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure Art.56A.303. Adult SAFE exams that do not meet mandated reporting requirements do not require law enforcement authorization. We seek to educate all team members about this so that all survivors will know their rights.

- **Secure timely access to sexual assault program advocates for all survivors.**

Members of the Atascosa County SART Team recognize the right of a victim of sexual violence to have an advocate available to assist the victim through their recovery and prior to detailed interviews, regardless of when the assault occurred. This practice has been codified in Government Code 420.003. A certified Sexual Assault Advocate will be contacted on behalf of any victim undergoing a SAFE exam. Safer Path will seek to expand the number of available advocates by training volunteers and staff through their Office of the Attorney General certified Sexual Assault Training Program.

- **Ensure all survivors receive the same level of quality services.**

The SART is committed to the principle that every survivor of sexual assault or abuse should have equitable access to quality services with each facility they interact with. Each of our members is dedicated to actively engaging in SART meetings and in open dialogue to identify and address any barriers that may affect service quality.

Member Roles & Definitions

Advocacy: SaferPath Family Violence Shelter (SPFVS)

The mission of Safer Path Family Violence Shelter is to build awareness of family violence and sexual assault, empower victims, support survivors' healing, and create a safe and abuse-free community.

The Safer Path 24-hour hotline offers:

- 24/7 hospital accompaniment for survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence
- Provide crisis intervention and advocacy to survivors and secondary survivors
- Arrange medical forensic examinations with survivors' consent
- Inform survivors of their rights
- Emotional support for survivors
- Safety planning
- Emergency shelter

Safer Path advocacy services offers:

- Counseling
- Support Groups
- Legal Advocacy
- Personal Advocacy
- Information and Referrals



Did You Know?

“Advocate” means a person who provides advocacy services as an employee or volunteer of a sexual assault program. The advocate must have completed a sexual assault training program described by Texas Local Government Code, Section 420.011 (b) for a minimum of 40 hours. Advocates respond 24/7 to all medical facilities/law enforcement agencies in and around Atascosa County and are not directly affiliated with law enforcement, hospital systems, or the criminal justice system.

Law Enforcement: Atascosa County Sheriff's Office, Pleasanton Police Department; Jourdanton Police Department, Poteet Police Department, Poteet Independent School District Police Department, Pleasanton Independent School District Police Department, and Lytle Police Department.

The Atascosa County law enforcement agencies are committed to enhancing the quality of life in our county by working in partnership with the community and other agencies to swiftly enforce the law, protect and serve the public, preserve the peace, reduce the fear of crime, and investigate crimes, identify and apprehend perpetrators, and maintain order. The Atascosa County law enforcement agencies are committed to treating all people with dignity, fairness, and respect.

The goals and responsibilities of the law enforcement agencies in Atascosa County are:

- Respond to the complaints of sexual assault
- Determine the jurisdiction of the offense
- Evaluate Sexual Assault cases in the context of the criminal and procedural statutes

- Investigate crimes of sexual and domestic violence
- Identify, collect, and preserve evidence
- Notify Survivor of their right to use pseudonyms
- Determine if forensic evidence is available and request from Survivor if they wish to participate
- Discuss the community-based Advocate with the Survivor to help them during the process
- Provide SPFVS information
- Maintain chain of custody of any evidence collected
- Conduct interviews with survivors, witnesses, and suspect(s)
- Make arrest when probable cause exists
- Prepare investigative reports
- Provide any and all documentation and evidence to Atascosa County District Attorney's Office, or an appropriate prosecuting office with jurisdiction
- Provide accurate evidence and testimony during courtroom proceedings
- Provide survivors with a Notice to Adult Victims of Sexual Assault resource
- Notify survivors in a timely manner regarding the status of any criminal case

81st District Attorney's Office: Atascosa County

The 81st District Attorney's Office has a duty to ensure that justice is served in every case by providing quality legal representation in criminal prosecution and, when appropriate, civil litigation with respect to protective orders. The office works to hold offenders accountable and protect victims. The office additionally works to reform and improve the criminal justice system and strengthen our community by responding appropriately to lower the incidence of crime in Atascosa County. To that end, we strive for excellence. We expect competence and professionalism and a commitment to the ends of securing justice without regard to status, race, gender or national origin.

Our Victim Services program provides the best possible direct and personal service to victims of crime and their families. It is our goal to assure those victimized that they have not been left behind by the criminal justice system. We strive to provide a safe place where victims can turn while searching for justice and understanding.

The 81st District Attorneys Office, working alongside the Victims Assistance Coordinator, delivers compassionate and highly effective services that encompass:

- Offer referrals for counseling services and other social services agencies
- Provide educational support regarding the justice process, preparation and accompaniment to court
- Notify survivors in a timely manner regarding the status of any criminal case and court proceeding
- Explanation of survivor rights
- TX Constitution Article 1, § 30, Crime Victims' Bill of Rights and TX CCP Chapter 56A
- Private waiting room for victims at the Justice Center
- Complete restitution orders
- Witness coordination during jury trials

- Offer guidance for navigating through various forms including Crime Victims Compensation and Victim Impact Statement

The District Attorney's Office is dedicated to connecting victims with essential resources to support them during this difficult period. Services are extended to victims regardless of whether the offender has been apprehended.

Medical: Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners: Forensic Center of Excellence (TXFNE: FCE), Bluebird's Hope, INC.

Medical facilities staffed by or contracted with highly trained and compassionate Forensic Nurse Examiners (FNEs) who are committed to providing survivor-centered medical forensic examinations for adults who have experienced abuse, as well as dignified suspect exams. Our FNEs complete specialized training to stay at the forefront of their field and provide ongoing education to patients, partners and the community.

- **Forensic Nurse Examiner (FNE):** A registered nurse specially trained to provide the medical forensic examination and evaluation of patients affected by trauma, violence, abuse and neglect while collecting evidence and minimizing the patient's emotional trauma. FNEs have extensive training on laws, sexual violence, trauma-informed care, evidence collection and coordination of care with other professionals, including the criminal justice system, when appropriate to advocate for victims. Forensic nurses practice includes larger patient populations like those affected by strangulation, domestic violence, and Human Trafficking.
- **Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE):** A registered nurse specially trained to provide the medical forensic examination and evaluation of sexual trauma while collecting evidence and minimizing the patient's emotional trauma. SANEs have extensive training on laws, sexual violence, trauma-informed care, evidence collection and coordination of care with other professionals, including the criminal justice system, when appropriate to advocate for victims. This may also include training for SANE's to address strangulation, domestic violence, and Human Trafficking. SANE is an area of certification and specialization within forensic nursing.
- **Medical Forensic Examination (MFE):** A Medical Forensic Examination (MFE), sometimes called a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Exam (SANE Exam) or Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE Exam), is conducted by medical personnel with key goals in mind. It may involve evaluating and treating trauma resulting from sexual assault, collection of specimens that may include physical evidence, addressing infection risks, and providing referrals to counseling and follow-up care. Providers conducting the exam may also engage with survivors to answer questions and discuss available options, always prioritizing the survivor's well-being and autonomy.

Bluebird's Hope will commit to: providing adult victims of sexual violence within Atascosa County with complete medical forensic exams, coordinating services with partners in the community, and working with partner agencies to ensure the best interests of the victims are always addressed.

Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners: The Forensic Center of Excellence (TXFNE: FCE), Forensic Nursing Program serves victims of violence within Atascosa County and is committed to providing high quality services to adult sexual assault victims and working with partner agencies to ensure the best interests of the victims are always addressed. The Forensic Nurses will offer and complete medical forensic exams for sexual assault victims while coordinating services with partners in the community.

Section 2: Atascosa County SART Protocols

The Atascosa County Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) protocol is a multidisciplinary approach that includes all member organizations, including survivor voices. This protocol is a living document and will be updated and amended based on the needs of the Sexual Assault Response Team. It is intended to supplement and support individual agency policies and procedures. Pursuant to SB 476, the Atascosa County SART will update and review these protocols a minimum of once every 2 years. The protocols include expectations and standards for each member's response to victims of sexual assault.

The protocol will identify points of collaboration between disciplines. In developing this protocol, the SART members:

1. Shall consider Chapter 56A, Code of Criminal Procedure.
2. May provide different procedures for use within a particular municipality or area of the county served by the response team.
3. Shall prioritize the health and safety of survivors.

Protocol 1: First Response by Law Enforcement

Point of Entry Atascosa County Law Enforcement Organizations: Atascosa County Sheriff's Office, Pleasanton Police Department; Jourdanton Police Department, Poteet Police Department, Poteet Independent School District Police Department, Pleasanton Independent School District Police Department.

Atascosa County law enforcement agencies are committed to enhancing the quality of life in our county by working in partnership with the community and other agencies to swiftly enforce the law, protect and serve the public, preserve the peace, reduce the fear of crime, investigate crimes, identify and apprehend perpetrators, and maintain order. Atascosa County law enforcement agencies are committed to treating all people with dignity, fairness, and respect.

The goals and responsibilities of **Atascosa County law enforcement agencies** are:

- Respond to the complaints of sexual assault, determine timeframe of the assault, and whether or not the report is delayed beyond the 120-hour window for SAFE
- Determine the jurisdiction of the offense
- Provide victim with Safer Path Family Violence Shelter (SPFVS) information
- Evaluate Sexual Assault cases in the context of the criminal and procedural statutes
- Investigate crimes of sexual violence
- Identify, collect, and preserve evidence
- Notify Survivor of their right to use pseudonyms
- Determine if forensic evidence is available and request from Survivor if they wish to participate
- State to the victim that they have the right to the services of a community-based Advocate from Safer Path to be with the Survivor to help them during the process
- Maintain chain of custody of any evidence collected

- Conduct interviews with survivors, witnesses, and suspect(s)
- Make arrest when probable cause exists
- Prepare investigative reports
- Provide any and all documentation and evidence to Atascosa County District Attorney's Office for indictment and prosecution
- Provide accurate evidence and testimony during courtroom proceedings
- Provide survivors with a Notice to Adult Victims of Sexual Assault resource
- Notify survivors in a timely manner regarding the status of any criminal case

Protocol if Victim's First Point of Entry is through Law Enforcement

In order to best support victims of sexual assault and hold offenders accountable, all **Atascosa County law enforcement agencies** will:

- Make contact with the survivor as soon as possible to address safety concerns and summon emergency medical assistance if needed
 - Responding law enforcement personnel should take every reasonable step to avoid causing any possible secondary trauma to the victim/survivor. LE officers should use a victim/survivor-centered approach to further this objective.
- Evaluate the scene for people, vehicles, or objects involved, as well as possible threats.
- Identify potential witnesses, suspect(s), or other involved parties.
- Determine if a crime is being reported and document the basic information needed to begin the investigation.
 - A reasonable effort should be made to allow the Survivor to determine the location where they make the initial report.
 - **VICTIM CONFIDENTIALITY** Officers investigating or receiving a report of an alleged sex offense may keep the identity of the victim confidential by providing the victim with a pseudonym form as provided by the Sexual Assault Prevention and Crisis Services program of the Texas Office of the Attorney General. The victim may choose a pseudonym to be used instead of his/her name (Tex. Code of Crim. Pro. art. 58.102)
- Locate, secure, and protect the crime scene to ensure that evidence is not lost, altered, or contaminated.
- If at a residence, in the community, or at a Law Enforcement Agency, the officer will offer support from a Safer Path Advocate to the victim as they take the report. A Safer Path Advocate will respond to the scene, if needed, to provide support and resources.
- If the assault is within the timeframe (120 hours) of a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE), ask the Survivor if they would submit to a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE).
- If the answer is yes, then contact will need to be made with Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners: Forensic Center of Excellence or Bluebird's Hope Inc. to begin the process of setting up the exam. Also, law enforcement will provide the victim with Safer Path contact information and resources, including the option to be accompanied by a Safer Path advocate for the SAFE.
- If the assault is within the 120-hour timeframe of a SAFE and the victim lacks transportation to the requested exam, contact must be made to the Safer Path hotline to request on-call transportation and/or Emergency Medical Services to arrange transportation. If the victim has life-threatening injuries, medical treatment must be provided first before a SAFE can be arranged.
- If the Survivor does not need or want a SAFE, then the Survivor will be provided with Safer Path information and resources.
- Notify On-Call investigator.

- Clearly explain the report process including the roles of the first responder, investigator, victim services and anyone else the Survivor will likely interact with.
- Provide the victim with a Notice to Adult Victims of Sexual Assault.
- If an arrest is made, provide the survivor with information regarding a request for an Emergency Protective Order (EPO) and provide them with Safer Path and Atascosa County Attorney contact information as they can assist the Survivor in applying for a permanent protective order.
- Any and all documents, recordings, and evidence will be forwarded to the Atascosa County Attorney or 81st Judicial District Attorney's Office for indictment and or prosecution.
- For offenses that occurred outside the jurisdiction of where the crime is being reported, the agency should notify the agency holding jurisdiction and determine if they wish to respond, or if they would like a report taken and forwarded to their agency. If they would like the report taken, then the use of SART protocols will be used and the case will be forwarded to the agency with jurisdiction.

Delayed Reporting

SB 1401- Delayed reporting and the assault occurred outside the 120-hour timeframe for a forensic exam, a report can still be taken, if the victim chooses.

Delayed reporting is not uncommon. When taking a delayed report that is not within the 120-hour timeframe for a forensic exam the survivor has the right to receive a sexual assault forensic exam.

There are situations where you can receive a medical forensic exam after the 120-hour timeframe has passed:

- If law enforcement believes that the exam could help with the investigation OR
- If a sexual assault nurse examiner or doctor tells law enforcement that there are reasons why an exam should still occur. OR
- If the victim requests an exam.

The protocol written above is laid out visually using a flow chart below.

First Response: Law Enforcement

Survivor calls 911 or contacts the non-emergency number for law enforcement agency



Deputy/Officer is dispatched and arrives on scene • Makes contact with Survivor and/or witnesses • Checks safety and medical needs of Survivor • Inquires with Survivor if an Advocate is Desired • Determines Location of sexual assault for scene security in order to protect and collect potential evidence • Determines the time frame of the sexual assault for a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE) within the 120-hour window • Notify the on-call CID • If at a residence, in the community, or at a law enforcement agency, the officer or sergeant on duty may request the Safer Path on-call Advocate to support the victim while giving their statement • If necessary, the victim advocate can also support with transportation, being present during the exam, and referrals to community resources

If:

Survivor Agrees to Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE)



Contact is made to facility where SAFE will take place. Law Enforcement will provide victim the option of Safer Path Advocate, including accompaniment.



Transportation to SAFE facility is determined by all parties involved.

If:

Survivor makes a delayed report and has a SAFE exam completed and entered into TRACK-KIT



Upon receipt of report, the assigned investigator will obtain the TRACK-KIT identification number in order to get the SAFE kit for submission.

If:

Survivor does not agree to Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE)



Deputy/Officer documents all information, collects available evidence and discusses with the Survivor/witnesses about the criminal process.



Deputy/Officer provides Survivor with resources and Safer Path Hotline.

***** For offenses that occurred outside the jurisdiction of where being reported, the agency should notify the agency holding jurisdiction and determine if they wish to respond or if they would like a report taken and forwarded to their agency. If they would like the report taken, then the use of SART protocols will be used and the case will be forwarded to the agency with jurisdiction.**

Protocol 2: First Response by Medical Support and Evidence

Survivor Access to Sexual Assault Forensic Exams (SAFE): Members of the Atascosa County Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) recognize the right of an adult victim of sexual violence to have a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE), regardless of when the assault occurred. This practice has been codified in the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure Art.56A.303. Adult SAFE exams that do not meet mandated reporting requirements do not require law enforcement authorization.

Survivors Access to Sexual Assault Program Advocates: Members of the Atascosa County SART Team recognize the right of a victim of a sexual violence to have an advocate available to assist the victim through their recovery and prior to detailed interviews, regardless of when the assault occurred. This practice has been codified in Government Code 420.003. A certified Sexual Assault Advocate will be contacted on behalf of any victim undergoing a SAFE exam.

Member Roles and Definitions

Adult: An individual who is not a child as defined by Section 101.003, Family Code.

Response Team: A multidisciplinary team established under Local Government Code Subchapter J to strengthen the collaborative response and enhance health and judicial outcomes for sexual assault survivors who are adults.

Sexual assault program:

A program that:

- a) Operates independently from a law enforcement agency or prosecutor's office;
- b) Is operated by a local public or private nonprofit corporation either independently or as part of a municipal, county, or state agency; and
- c) Provides the minimum services, as defined by Section 420.003, Government Code, to adult survivors of stranger and non-stranger sexual violence.

Survivor: An individual who is a victim of a sexual assault or other sex offense, regardless of whether a police report is filed for the incident.

Suspect: An individual who is identified by a law enforcement agency as a potential actor in the commission of a crime.

Medical Facilities: Medical facilities staffed by or contracted with highly trained and compassionate Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE) are committed to providing survivor-centered medical sexual assault exams for adults who have experienced abuse, as well as dignified suspect exams. Our Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners routinely attend specialized training to stay at the forefront of their field.

Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE): A registered nurse specially trained to provide the forensic/medical examination and evaluation of sexual trauma while collecting evidence and minimizing the patient's emotional trauma. SANEs have extensive training on laws, sexual violence, trauma-informed care, evidence collection and coordination of care with other professionals, including the criminal justice system, when appropriate to advocate for victims. This may also include training for SANE's to address strangulation, domestic violence, and Human Trafficking.

Medical Forensic Examination (MFE): A Medical Forensic Examination (MFE), sometimes called a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Exam (SANE Exam) or Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE Exam), is conducted by medical personnel with key goals in mind. It may involve evaluating and treating trauma resulting from sexual assault, collection of specimens that may include physical evidence, addressing infection risks, and providing referrals to counseling and follow-up care. Providers conducting the exam may also engage with survivors to answer questions and discuss available options, always prioritizing the survivor's well-being and autonomy.

Medical Protocol

Point of Entry: Methodist Hospital Atascosa, Bluebird's Hope, Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners: Forensic Center of Excellence

Victims of sexual assault have several options to request a Sexual Assault examination. The victim can directly make a call to a hotline, or it can be initiated by law enforcement, an advocacy agency, or medical personnel. Once the survivor agrees to the exam, a nurse will schedule it immediately or based on the survivor's and the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner's availability.

The goals and responsibilities of Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners serving Atascosa County are:

- Conduct MFEs for adult sexual assault patients in accordance with all agreed-upon protocols and procedures;
- Assure that Safer Path Family Violence Shelter (SPFVS), or the nearest appropriate advocacy agency that serves victims of sexual assault has been notified that a victim is being transported or has arrived;
- Encourage/support the use of trained sexual assault advocates for sexual assault patients as appropriate and regardless of patient's decision regarding contact with law enforcement;
- Provide time and private space for sexual assault advocates to establish relationships with the victim, the victim's family/caregivers, and friends when appropriate and if the victims and family/caregivers agree;
- Establish and maintain competency as a SANE;
- Support the development and annual review of the community's guidelines; and
- Participate, as appropriate, in cross training with allied professionals regarding response to sexual assault.

Point of Entry: Medical Facilities

- Escort this patient and their family, caregiver or support persons to a private waiting area. Elicit information as privately as possible, regarding:
 - Safety (Is the patient physically and psychologically safe? Is the suspected perpetrator present? Speaking with patient alone is important to obtain accurate information), Pain, and Bleeding.
- Patients who report acute sexual assault, or those who are suspected of being acutely sexually assaulted, should have an Emergency Severity Index (ESI) Triage Level 2. The patient should be seen as soon as possible and triaged to assess for life- or limb-threatening injuries or psychiatric emergencies. Any life- or limb-threatening injuries or psychiatric emergencies take precedence over forensic evidence collection. The medical assessment may take place before or concurrently with MFE, depending on facility policy. Be aware of time-sensitive medications that may be administered.

- Medical providers should use clinical judgement regarding consultation of additional providers or referral to a higher level of care if the current setting is not appropriate for the patient evaluation. The patient has the right to refuse care at any time.
- If the assault occurred within the last 12 hours and the patient has not had anything to eat or drink, educate the patient that it is best not use restroom, wash, change clothes, eat or drink until evaluated by the forensic health care professional. If patient must use restroom, collect urine and advise that patient does not wipe genitalia until after evidence has been collected, if possible. Use clinical judgment.
- Once appropriate, all survivors should be offered an MFE and an advocate from the advocacy agency that serves the victim's county, and/or the county where the victim was assaulted.
- In Atascosa County, medical personnel or survivors can contact an appropriate forensic provider, depending on facility policy and procedures. Currently, March 2025, the available forensic providers serving Atascosa County are listed below:

Bluebird's Hope, Inc.	Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners: Forensic Center of Excellence (FCE)
Hotline: (830) 316-3926	Hotline: (210) 767-9556
Atascosa County Location(s): <i>None as of March 2025</i>	Atascosa County Location(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methodist Hospital Atascosa 1905 Hwy 97 East Jourdanton, TX 78026
Additional Location(s): <i>Comal County</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2115 Stephens Place Suite 400J New Braunfels, TX, USA <i>Guadalupe County</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1117 E Court St Seguin, TX 78155, USA <i>Wilson County</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency Care of Floresville 101 Wilson Drive, Ste. 102 Floresville, TX 78114 	Additional Location(s): Call Hotline (210) 767-9556 and select option 1 to speak with a forensic nurse regarding available locations. <i>As of March 2025, FCE is currently serving 53 locations across Atascosa, Bexar, Comal, Frio, Gillespie, Guadalupe, Kendall, Kerr and Medina Counties.</i>

In Atascosa County, medical personnel or survivors can contact **Safer Path Family Violence Shelter's 24/7 Hotline at 830-569-2001** for hospital accompaniment and advocacy.

To obtain patient consent, medical personnel may explain to patients that there are two specially trained providers available to respond to patients affected by sexual violence and the medical facility would like to contact these individuals to speak with the patient and provide any available resources and to assist with the appropriate care. Once the sexual assault advocate and the SANE arrive, they will discuss their roles, explain the examination process, and survivor rights before conducting the SAFE with the victim/survivor.

Point of Entry: Law Enforcement

If the victim's initial contact is with law enforcement- follow protocol for investigations and once appropriate, **all survivors should be offered a MFE and an advocate** from the advocacy agency that serves the victim's county,

and/or the county where the victim was assaulted. In Atascosa County, law enforcement should contact the **Safer Path Family Violence Shelter's 24/7 Hotline at 830-569-2001** to have a sexual assault advocate available to assist the victim and to assist in arranging a forensic exam.

If seeking consultation with forensic nursing programs, law enforcement or survivors can contact an appropriate forensic provider, depending on facility policy and procedures. Currently, March 2025, the available forensic providers serving Atascosa County are listed below:

Bluebird's Hope, Inc.	Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners: Forensic Center of Excellence (FCE)
Hotline: (830) 316-3926	Hotline: (210) 767-9556
Atascosa County Location(s): <i>None as of November 2025</i>	Atascosa County Location(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methodist Hospital Atascosa 1905 Hwy 97 East Jourdanton, TX 78026
Additional Location(s): <i>Comal County</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2115 Stephens Place Suite 400J New Braunfels, TX, USA <i>Guadalupe County</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1117 E Court St Seguin, TX 78155, USA <i>Wilson County</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency Care of Floresville 101 Wilson Drive, Ste. 102, Floresville, TX 78114 	Additional Location(s): Call Hotline (210) 767-9556 and select option 1 to speak with a forensic nurse regarding available locations. <i>As of November 2025, FCE is currently serving 53 locations across Atascosa, Bexar, Comal, Frio, Gillespie, Guadalupe, Kendall, Kerr and Medina Counties.</i>

To obtain patient consent, law enforcement partners may explain to victims that there are **two specially trained providers available to respond to patients affected by sexual violence** and the law enforcement agency would like to contact these individuals to speak with the patient and provide any available resources and to assist with the appropriate care.

Once the sexual assault advocate and the SANE arrive, they will discuss their roles, explain the examination process, and survivor rights before conducting the SAFE with the victim/survivor. Law Enforcement can provide transportation for victims, coordinate transport with an advocate from Safer Path Family Violence Shelter or another appropriate advocacy agency, EMS, or victims may choose to use a private vehicle.

Additionally, any suspect of a sexual assault will be sent to an appropriate SANE provider to have a SAFE exam performed when requested by a law enforcement agency. Officers will remain at the facility with any suspect brought to the facility for this purpose. A SAFE on a suspect will only be done on the consent of the suspect or in accordance with Texas Penal Code, Code of Criminal Procedure Art. 18.08. or another appropriate mandated request. If the safety of the patient, accompanying law enforcement, and medical personnel cannot be maintained throughout the duration of the examination, the exam will be discontinued, and an alternate plan will be made to collect evidence in a safe manner.

Protocol 3: First Response by Safer Path Family Violence Shelter

Point of Entry: Victim seeks advocacy-support by calling the Safer Path Family Violence Shelter Hotline : (830-569-2001)

When a survivor contacts Safer Path Family Violence Shelter their needs are carefully assessed and tailored resources and options are presented based on their unique experiences. The caller's well-being and safety is our top priority.

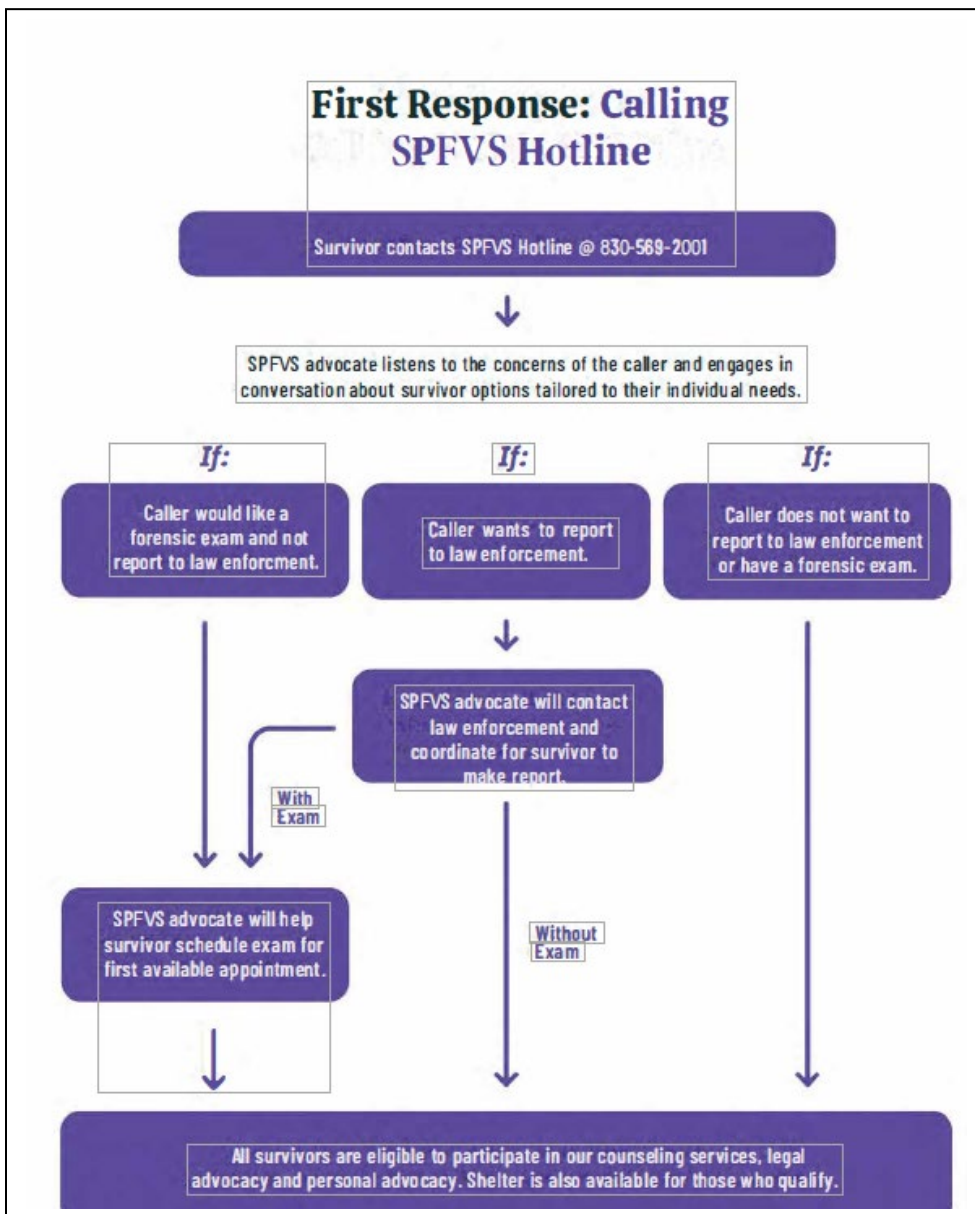
- If a caller discloses that a sexual assault has occurred and they would like to move forward with a forensic exam, the caller will be connected to an on-call Safer Path Advocate to help coordinate a forensic exam. The advocate will also offer hospital accompaniment and advocacy services.
- If the caller requests to make a police report, the advocate will reach out to the appropriate law enforcement agency to request that an officer meet them at the hospital. The survivor does not have to report to law enforcement to be eligible for SPFVS services or to receive a forensic exam.
 - The survivor can request to report to law enforcement without having a forensic exam.
- If the survivor does not want a forensic exam, the SPFVS Hotline staff will support the caller by providing immediate crisis intervention, emotional support, safety planning, and referral to SPFVS Advocacy department.
- In Atascosa County, advocacy partners or survivors can contact an appropriate forensic provider, depending on facility policy and procedures. Currently, March 2025, the available forensic providers serving Atascosa County are listed below:

Bluebird's Hope, Inc.	Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners: Forensic Center of Excellence (FCE)
Hotline: (830) 316-3926	Hotline: (210) 767-9556
Atascosa County Location(s): <i>None as of March 2025</i>	Atascosa County Location(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methodist Hospital Atascosa 1905 Hwy 97 East Jourdanton, TX 78026
Additional Location(s): <i>Comal County</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2115 Stephens Place Suite 400J New Braunfels, TX, USA <i>Guadalupe County</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1117 E Court St Seguin, TX 78155, USA <i>Wilson County</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency Care of Floresville 101 Wilson Drive, Ste. 102 Floresville, TX 78114 	Additional Location(s): Call Hotline (210) 767-9556 and select option 1 to speak with a forensic nurse regarding available locations. <i>As of March 2025, FCE is currently serving 53 locations across Atascosa, Bexar, Comal, Frio, Gillespie, Guadalupe, Kendall, Kerr and Medina Counties.</i>

- Safer Path Family Violence Shelter Advocates should contact an appropriate SANE provider to speak with the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner on duty to coordinate care for the Sexual Assault Examination (SAFE) and to provide the estimated time of arrival.

- Survivors should be notified of their rights to determine the medical facility and mode of transportation to the facility of their choice to receive a SAFE exam and medical attention.
- Safer Path Family Violence Shelter advocates can provide transportation for victims, coordinate transport with law enforcement or EMS, or victims may choose to use a private vehicle.
- An advocate will arrive at the medical facility within one hour of the request unless an exam has been scheduled for a future time.

The protocol written above is laid out visually using a flow chart below.



Protocol 4: Response by 81st District Attorney's Office – Atascosa County

Point of Entry: Victim's case seeks advocacy-support by calling the Safer Path Family Violence Shelter Hotline : (830-569-2001)

The 81st District Attorney's Office (hereafter, "DAO") prosecutes felony offenses in Wilson, Karnes, Atascosa, Frio, and La Salle Counties.

- The prosecutors handle felony complaints involving adult and minor victims of sex-related offenses. Erika Price and Audrey Vasquez, Assistant District Attorneys, are available to answer questions, review evidence, file charges, and assist on search warrants as needed. The prosecutors are available 24/7.
- If law enforcement has obtained an arrest warrant, the investigating agency shall promptly bring all available reports and evidence to the DAO for review for possible presentation to a grand jury.
- If the investigating agency feels a case warrants prosecutor review prior to obtaining a warrant, the case may be submitted to the DAO for possible presentation to a grand jury.
- When advocacy agencies or other dedicated professionals have a referral, it is first made to a law enforcement agency, who will then arrest and/or present the case to the DAO for consideration of charges.
- Prosecutors are available for case submissions every Friday at the Atascosa County Justice Center from 9am to 11am. Any change in this schedule will be announced via email to all Atascosa County law enforcement agencies.
- Prosecutors will review all available evidence and work with the investigative agency to obtain any additional information or evidence needed for successful prosecution.
- Once all available evidence is received and reviewed, prosecutors will make a charging decision. Charging decisions, as well as the decision of whether to move forward with prosecution, are made at the sole discretion of the prosecutors. Legally and ethically, charging decisions are based on the evidence and whether the case can be proven beyond a reasonable doubt at trial.
- Victims may contact the DAO for information on charging decisions once the case has been submitted for prosecutor review. Prosecutors may reach out to victims prior to presentation to grand jury.
- Prosecutors will inform or attempt to inform victims of the charging decision and/or result of grand jury presentation. If charges are accepted, the Prosecutors and/or Victim Assistance Coordinator (VAC) will reach out to the victim to ensure the mandates of CCP Chapter 56A are being met.
- If victim wants to drop charges, the VAC will refer victim to the local domestic violence shelter, Safer Path Family Violence Shelter, to take a victim empowerment class, Resources and Information for Survivor Empowerment (RISE), and let them know that they will need to follow up with a meeting with the Prosecutors and VAC after class is completed. VAC will explain that the Prosecutors reserve the right to continue with the case, if they feel like the evidence supports continuing.

- Unless requested by the Prosecutor, law enforcement, or another partner agency, the Victim Assistant Coordinator begins communication with the victim once the case is indicted. Upon indictment, VAC will send victim impact statement (VIS) via mail or email, which contains information on victim rights, information on Crime Victim's Compensation, information on the case (defendant, charge, court, and cause number assigned to the case) and contact information for VAC.
- Victims can contact the VAC for information about criminal justice process so that they know what to expect during process, start to finish.
 - VAC facilitates and attends meetings between Prosecutors and victims. The VAC and/or Prosecutors will explain to the victim the right of victim input regarding victim loss, trauma, or restitution for possible presentation of evidence at the time of the plea hearing and/or to provide a Victim Impact Statement or Allocution.
 - VAC notifies victims of how to register with Victim Information Notification Everyday (VINE) system, register with Texas Department of Criminal Justice Victim Services and how to use the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) website to track any defendant that has been sent to prison.
 - VAC attends Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) meetings to collaborate with multiple disciplinary entities to ensure victims' needs are met throughout criminal justice process.
- Victims can request assistance from the VAC, who can aid victims in the following ways:
 - Filing CVC paperwork with the Office of the Attorney General. VAC will also facilitate the transfer of documents (medical bills, funeral purchase agreements, and police reports) to the Office of the Attorney General.
 - Filling out the Victim Impact Statement.
 - Refer victims to outside resources for services such as domestic violence shelters and rape crisis centers that provide counseling, legal services for civil matters, and social services, and other counselors. Safer Path Family Violence Shelter is the local resource that serves victims of domestic violence and sexual assault in Atascosa county. VAC makes referrals to victims to the County Attorney's Office for the purpose of obtaining Protective Orders, regardless of whether or not a criminal case is pursued.
 - VAC will aid victims, regardless of whether charges are filed, with referrals or other information.
- If the victim wants to be informed of updates to the case, they will be updated as needed. Prosecutors will ensure the victim is aware of any proposed plea agreement and obtain feedback.
- Pursuant to CCP Art. 7B.001(a-1) if a defendant is convicted or placed on deferred adjudication for one of the enumerated offenses, Prosecutors will file a lifetime protective order ("PO") application with respect to each victim. Pursuant to CCP Art. 7B.001(a-2), the prosecutor may not file a PO application if the victim is 18 years or older and requests that the prosecutor not file one

- CCP Art. 7B.001 (a-1)-Default Protective Orders After Defendant is Convicted or Placed on Deferred Adjudication for Certain Enumerated Offenses ("enumerated offenses"):
 - Tex. Pen. Code§ 21.02: Continuous Sexual Abuse of Young Child or Disabled Individual
 - Tex. Pen. Code§ 21.11: Indecency with a Child
 - Tex. Pen. Code§ 22.011: Sexual Assault
 - Tex. Pen. Code§ 22.012: Indecent Assault
 - Tex. Pen. Code§ 22.021: Aggravated Sexual Assault

Section 3: Procedures

Atascosa County Sexual Assault Response Team Meetings

The Atascosa County SART is committed to meeting at minimum quarterly each year. No later than the 90th day after the last day of a regular legislative session, the SART must review and amend any response team protocols, forms, or guidelines required by Texas Local Government Code, Chapter 351, Subchapter J. The SART will plan the meeting dates and times in advance and notify all participating agencies. As described in Section 351.254(b) of the Local Government Code each appointed member of the SART must attend all meetings or they are expected to send a representative of their agency. Because SART members are appointed by the Atascosa County Judge, any vacancies must be filled and confirmed by the Atascosa County Commissioner's Court as described in Section 351.255. Any SART partners can add items to the agenda by emailing the SART facilitator at least 24 hours in advance.

At least 4 hours of cross-training will be offered to SART members annually as required by Section 351.256 of the Texas Government Code. This training will include the dynamics of sexual assault and the roles, responsibilities, and limitations of the participating disciplines.

Data Collection, Evaluation and Assessing Sexual Assault Trends

The members of SART, including forensic nursing partners, will collect data and information that will allow the SART to analyze community trends including those related to drug-facilitated assault, predatory date rape, and sex trafficking. In Atascosa County, the SART will work collaboratively to gather, maintain and report this information.

Conflict Resolution

Conflicts between team members are bound to arise from time to time. When handled appropriately, the resolution of the conflict can be a growth experience for all parties involved. Resolution of any conflicts arising pursuant to the process outlined in this agreement, other than personal matters may be dealt with in the following manner:

- The conflicting professionals should meet to discuss the conflict and how to resolve it. Often this includes sharing information, and understanding the different roles and responsibilities of the parties involved.
- If the conflict cannot be resolved after a meeting between the conflicting professionals, the professionals' immediate supervisors may become involved and the matter will be discussed at a meeting with all persons present, in accordance with each respective agencies operating procedures.

Confidentiality and Interagency Information Sharing

In accordance with Section 351.256 of the Texas Local Government Code, the SART members agree to promote interagency information sharing, in accordance with state and federal law, to ensure the timely exchange of relevant information and enhance the response to survivors. Each discipline engaged in the SART has its own policies and procedures regarding what information can be shared and will abide by its own agencies guidelines in sharing information. While case-specific information should not be discussed at the SART meeting, SART members agree to maintain confidentiality of such references (I.e. – victim/survivors name and contact information). Confidentiality is not intended to create a barrier to victim-centered changes in the response to sexual assault.

The SART members agree to follow Section 351.258 of the Texas Local Government Code which states that the Sexual Assault Response Team may only review a sexual assault case of an adult survivor with the signed, written consent of the survivor. The consent must specify:

1. The information or records covered by the release;
2. The reason or purpose for the release; and,
3. The person or agency to which the information is to be released.

Biennial Evaluation of Atascosa County's Sexual Assault Response

Every odd-numbered year, beginning in 2023, the Sexual Assault Response Team will provide the Atascosa County Commissioners Court a report that includes the following information, as defined in Section 351.257 in the Local Government Code:

1. The list of required SART members that have been appointed to the SART.
2. A copy of the current written and distributed Atascosa County Sexual Assault Response Protocol.
3. Either
 - a. A report that provides:
 - i. The number of adult sexual assault reports received by local law enforcement agencies.
 - ii. The number of investigations conducted as a result of the reports received.
 - iii. The number of indictments presented in connection with a report and the disposition of those cases.
 - iv. The number of reports of adult sexual assault for which no indictment was presented.
 - b. Or, An explanation of the reason the response team failed to provide the information above.

Case Review: Evaluation of Protocols

On Monday, November 10, 2025, the following SART members and their agency heads met to discuss a case that occurred in February of 2021.

SART Members Present: Jesusita Soto from Camino Real Community Services, John Strause from Atascosa County Sheriff's Office, William Permenter from Poteet PD, Carissa Futterer from TxFNE: FCE, Andrea Rathmell from Safer Path, Erika Price from the 81st District Attorney's Office, Imelda Gomez from Safer Path, Rhonda Williamson from Safer Path, Katie Quinney from the 81st District Attorney's Office, Audrey Louis from the 81st District Attorney's Office, and Jonathan Fischer from the Atascosa County Attorney's Office.

Each agency reviewed their protocol through the lens of this particular sexual assault case that happened in our county to evaluate our protocols, see what is working, and learn what may need to improve or be updated.

The case file from each agency was reviewed in order of the survivor's journey through interacting with each agency, using the specific protocol elements described in the SART protocol section above.

Survivor's Experience Checklist was reviewed and discussed. The summary of this checklist is below.

Initial Contact: Sexual Assault Program & LE/Sheriff	
Was the survivor able to access services immediately (Hotline, Dispatch)?	Yes
Did the initial response (LE/Advocate) align with trauma-informed best practices?	Yes
Medical/Forensic Exam: SANE/Healthcare & Advocacy Program	
Was SANE immediately contacted?	Yes
Was the advocate present for accompaniment (as per protocol)?	No
Was the Chain of Custody properly maintained?	Yes
Investigation: Law Enforcement/Sheriff	
Was the investigator assigned promptly?	Yes
Was the interview process trauma-informed?	No
Was evidence collected and submitted within the protocol's mandated timeline?	Yes
Legal/Prosecution: District Attorney's Office & Advocacy Program	
Was the DA/Prosecutor contacted at the appropriate point?	Yes
Was the survivor promptly informed of case status and afforded rights (e.g., protected pseudonym)?	Yes
Long-Term Support: Behavioral Health and Sexual Assault Program	
Was the survivor provided a warm handoff for long-term counseling/support services?	Yes
Was the referral process from the program/LE to behavioral health seamless?	Yes

Assessed Systemic Barriers. Significant communication breakdowns occurred, particularly with Poteet PD, and advocates were not notified at critical points. Limited SANE coverage required EMS to transport the victim over an hour away, increasing delays and stress. Resource gaps meant no advocate was present at the hospital, and inaccurate contact information hindered follow-up. Improvements since include collecting alternate contacts and emails and integrating EMS documentation into evidence. These findings highlight the need for stronger communication channels, adequate regional resources, and consistent documentation practices..

Evaluate protocol fidelity and impact: Although SART protocols were not in place at the time, reviewing the case through today's standards revealed the most trauma-uninformed moment was the police interview, where bias and disbelief retraumatized the victim. Initial on-scene response was appropriate, but gaps in referrals and victim rights communication were noted. Leadership changes at Poteet PD and DA office adjustments have improved practices, but continued training is essential.

Future Action & Training: The SART prioritized inter-agency training on trauma-informed interviewing, victim behavior, and bias awareness, along with sexual assault dynamics and courtroom testimony. Additional needs include effective body-camera use, report tracking across agencies, and consistent report-writing standards. Protocol revisions will require law enforcement to call advocates to the scene and adopt uniform trauma-informed practices. These steps aim to strengthen collaboration and ensure survivor-centered responses.

Key Takeaways: Early engagement with victims is critical, and communication paired with empathy makes a measurable difference. Trauma-informed interviews and approaches remain a top priority for training. Partners agreed to stay curious, ask more questions, and avoid judgment to better serve survivors. Connecting victims to advocacy early and clearly communicating that all agencies work as a united team are essential practices. The team is proud that this case resulted in a positive outcome for the victim, whose powerful impact statement underscored the importance of victim services and support throughout the process.

Conclusion

Challenges & Success

The SART's greatest success has been establishing regular meetings and fostering communication among agencies, creating a collaborative environment that did not exist during the reviewed case. While turnover across organizations has posed challenges, it has also brought fresh perspectives and renewed energy to the team.

Recommendations

Key recommendations include prioritizing trauma-informed training for all partners, eliminating victim-blaming, and ensuring advocates are called first in every case. Collecting alternate contact information and maintaining thorough documentation are essential to strengthen case outcomes and survivor support.

SART's Impact

Although the SART was not active during the case reviewed, its current collaboration and communication represent a significant improvement in systemic response. The team's commitment to working together can only enhance outcomes for survivors moving forward.

Next Steps & Goals for the Next Two Years

The SART will focus on expanding training, improving inter-agency communication, and developing written procedures to ensure continuity despite staff turnover. Additional goals include conducting timely case debriefs to build relationships, creating a survivor advisory committee for direct feedback, and drafting a conflict resolution process. These steps aim to deepen collaboration and maintain a survivor-centered approach.

Conclusion and Acknowledgment

We extend our deepest gratitude to every member of the Atascosa County Sexual Assault Response Team and to our county leadership for their unwavering support and commitment to this work. Your dedication to collaboration, training, and continuous improvement has strengthened our community's ability to respond to survivors with compassion and accountability. Together, we have made significant progress, and we remain committed to building on this foundation. Over the next biennium, we will continue working side by side to ensure a coordinated, trauma-informed, and survivor-centered response that reflects the values of justice, dignity, and hope for all survivors of sexual assault in Atascosa County.