



# BIENNIAL REPORT 2023

Brazoria County Adult Sexual Assault Response Team

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Background

During the 87<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature, Senate Bill 476 passed and went into effect on September 1, 2021, under Texas Local Government Code Chapter 351, Subchapter J (Sections 251 through 258). The new law mandated the formation of an Adult Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), established by the commissioners court of each county to strengthen the collaborative response, and enhance health and judicial outcomes for sexual assault survivors. On November 23, 2021 the Commissioners Court of Brazoria County established the Brazoria County Adult Sexual Assault Response Team, appointing its first six members. On November 29, 2021, the SART met for the first time, bringing representatives from various agencies throughout the community together with a common goal to increase efficacy of response and to minimize traumatization of adult sexual assault survivors.

## Objectives

Since its formation, the Brazoria County SART has established several objectives, both mandated and internally driven. These include:

- Identify and include key stakeholders, in addition to the legislatively mandated participants, to ensure a more comprehensive community assessment of adult sexual assault victim's needs.
- Establish and submit written protocols addressing the coordinated response for adult survivors in accordance with Texas Government Code 351.256.
- Develop quarterly cross-agency training on the dynamics of sexual assault for response team members.
- Review comprehensive data being collected by all agencies to better identify adult sexual assault victims and community vulnerabilities.
- Ensure adequate resources and procedures are in place to offer around-the-clock access to sexual assault program advocates.

## Challenges

- Unfunded mandate that placed an increased requirement on multiple, historically understaffed, disciplines. This includes not only sexual assault program advocates, but also crime victims liaisons to assist with law enforcement accompaniments.

- Identified the language used by various disciplines had inconsistent meanings, leading to discussion and clarification of various definitions to ensure the most accurate data collection possible.
- Unexpected resignation of initial presiding officer.
- Representation of only a portion of law enforcement agencies across the county.
- Balancing the prioritization of adult survivor confidentiality with reporting and case review requirements.
- Regression in volunteers at community centers following the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- Gaps in advocate availability for hospital accompaniments.
- Specific training required to certify advocates was found to be ill-defined and difficult to access.

## **Accomplishments**

- Brazoria County demonstrated an overwhelming commitment and initiative with the timeliness of the Brazoria County Adult SART establishment; with the first meeting taking place just six days following appointments. Today the SART consists of 10 members, representing eight different organizations throughout Brazoria County.
- Embraced the seriousness of the work with a more rigorous meeting schedule throughout 2022 vs quarterly recommended in the legislation. This resulted in a comprehensive and timely completion and adoption of Brazoria County Adult SART Sexual Assault Protocol.
- Strengthening interdisciplinary relationships with clarification of responsibilities.
- Established quarterly training to better educate members of the various roles represented for the best trauma informed response to adult sexual assault victims.
- Met with Southeast Texas Police Chiefs Association (SETPCA) to attempt to gain additional LE involvement on May 10, 2023.

## **Recommendations**

The Brazoria County Adult SART must continue to educate organizations throughout the community and expand its representation in law enforcement agencies and sexual assault advocate resources. The more data that can be collected, and the more resources that we can utilize to facilitate the care of sexual assault victims, the better the community becomes at providing a wholesome, trauma informed response.

# SART OVERVIEW

## **Purpose**

The purpose of the Brazoria County Adult SART is to strengthen the collaborative response and enhance health and judicial outcomes for sexual assault survivors who are adults, of the age 18 or older. Our mission is to ensure a competent and trauma informed interdisciplinary response from all agencies involved with adult victims of sexual assault.

## **Membership Composition**

Brazoria County Alliance for Children - Kristi Hawkins

Brazoria County District Attorney's Office - Mary Aldous

Brazoria County Sheriff's Office - LT Jeff Mink

Brazos Place - Joe Gardzina

Memorial Hermann Health System Forensic Nursing Services - Jamie Ferrell

Pearland Police Department - CPT Derek Dunham (Presiding Officer)

Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners - Khara Breeden Texas

Forensic Nurse Examiners - Brookley Del Bosque

Women's Center of Brazoria County - Claudette Tuggle

Women's Center of Brazoria County - Kathi Perkins

# WRITTEN PROTOCOLS

## Mission

The Brazoria County Adult Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) is comprised of representatives from Women's Center of Brazoria County, Brazoria County District Attorney's Office, Brazoria County Sheriff's Office, Pearland Police Department, Memorial Hermann Health System Forensic Nursing Services, Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners, and Adapt Programs. The mission of the Brazoria County Adult SART is to ensure a competent and informed interdisciplinary response from all agencies involved to adult victims of sexual assault.

WE, the undersigned Agencies, by and through our designated representatives, agree to support the stated mission of the Brazoria County Adult SART.

WE further hereby agree:

To minimize the re-victimization of adult sexual assault victims through the investigation, assessment, intervention and prosecution processes;

To maintain a cooperative response team approach to facilitate successful outcomes in the criminal justice systems through shared fact-finding and strong, collaborative case development;

To continue to improve processes and work with professionals in the community who deal with adult victims of sexual assault;

To serve as a local and regional resource for information and education on adult sexual assault issues;

That all State and Federal confidentiality laws will be followed in connection with this agreement; and

That this document shall be reviewed and modified as deemed necessary by the SART to ensure compliance with all state and federal laws as well as recognized best practices within the field, or upon a change of authorized partner signatories.

## Vision

Brazoria County Adult SART is committed to improving the treatment of adult sexual assault survivors with respect and compassion through trauma informed practices, and to promote the apprehension and prosecution of perpetrators.

## Goals

The goals of the Brazoria County Adult SART are the following:

- I. Minimize trauma

- II. Provide advocacy and support
- III. Refer to community providers to meet needs
- IV. Hold offenders accountable

## Values

### I. VICTIM-CENTERED APPROACH

- a. This approach is defined as the systematic focus on the needs of the victim and accounts for the victim's history, experience, and perspective, as well as the impact of the criminal justice process on them and their family and community. In a victim-centered approach, the victim's safety and well-being take priority in all matters and procedures.
- b. A victim-centered approach seeks to minimize re-traumatization associated with the criminal justice process by providing the support of advocates and service providers, empowering victims as engaged participants in the criminal justice process, and providing victims an opportunity to play a role in seeing justice served.
- c. This approach is one of the most important aspects of the collaboration that arises from Adult SARTs: the knowledge that we gain from a collaborative response to sexual assault in our community promotes trust among partners and seeks to keep victims at the center of our justice process.

### II. TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

- a. An understanding of trauma and its effects, as well as the principles of being trauma-informed, are key for service providers and criminal justice system professionals. We must understand trauma and its manifestations and approach all interactions through a trauma-informed lens.
- b. Trauma-informed approach is a strengths-based framework that is responsive to the impact of trauma, emphasizing physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both Adult SART responders and victims; and creates opportunities for victims to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment. The approach:
  - i. Realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;
  - ii. Recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in victims, families, staff, and others involved with the system;
  - iii. Responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and
  - iv. Seeks to actively resist re-traumatization.



### III. REDUCE VICTIM-BLAMING

- a. Victim blaming refers to attitudes or beliefs that hold victims partially or completely responsible for being sexually assaulted. Victim blaming typically utilizes the argument that if the victim had not made a particular choice, engaged in a particular activity, or acted in a particular way, this person would not have been assaulted. Victims usually engage in this type of second guessing and hearing any variation of this theme from others adds to the trauma already being experienced.
- b. Through collaborative response and cross-agency training, the Adult SART seeks to ensure that the blame for the crime remains set on those who perpetrated the crime.

### IV. TEAM BUILDING BETWEEN AGENCIES

- a. The relationships that we build with each other as members of the Adult SART are essential to achieve positive outcomes in sexual assault cases. Collaborative response provides a systematic response that allows victims to feel supported, informed and involved. It is essential that this team make time to build and strengthen relationships and address issues that arise through a multi-disciplinary approach of its members, with the best interest of victims in mind. We must also search for ways to increase collaboration between the partners.

### V. STANDARDS AND TRAINING

- a. Adult SART members will ensure the policies and effort it puts forth promote best practices and effective intervention to address adult sexual assault in the county. To do this, Adult SART members will meet at least quarterly.
- b. Members of the Adult SART will commit to attending and providing cross training opportunities between all partner agencies annually. Members also commit to respond to requests for cross training.
- c. This Protocol will be reviewed and updated annually by the Adult SART members. As part of the implementation process, there is a commitment by all partners to provide training to their agencies on the Protocol and all updates thereafter.
- d. The Adult SART members will plan and implement effective prevention strategies and collaborate with other agencies, including educational institutions, to address adult sexual assault in the county. Areas of focus may include sexual assault perpetrated by strangers or persons known to the adult victim, predatory date rape, and drug-facilitated sexual assault.

### Agency Commitments

- I. The role of the **Brazoria County District Attorney's Office (DA's office)** is to file appropriate criminal charges and to seek justice. Charging decisions shall be based upon the professional judgment of the District Attorney's Office.

The DA's Office commits to:

1. Designate a liaison to serve as a resource person for the SART.
2. Routinely share information among team members and provide information about the case status as needed and as allowed by law.
3. Maintain communication and contact with the SART and establish a method for follow-up of disposition of cases.
4. Provide reasonable notification of upcoming trial(s) to all witnesses who will be testifying in court.
5. Participate in SART and community training activities as determined by SART.
6. Collaborate with crime victim liaison to meet victim needs regarding crime victim's rights, compensation, and services throughout prosecution.
7. Provide ongoing process improvement information to the SART.

- II. The role of the **Women's Center of Brazoria County** is to aid survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault and their children to achieve safety and self-sufficiency.

Women's Center of Brazoria County commits to:

1. Designate a liaison to serve as a resource person for the SART.
2. Routinely share information among team members and provide information about case status as needed and as allowed by law.
3. Participate in SART and community training activities as determined by the SART.
4. Collaborate with other members of the SART to meet client needs regarding crime victim's rights, advocacy, and accompaniment throughout the justice and restorative process.
5. Provide investigative interview accompaniments when requested by victim during regular office hours Monday through Friday 8:30 am to 4:30 p.m.
6. Provide a simple call system with minimal phone calls that will facilitate rapid response to victim's needs.
7. Demonstrate a 60-minute response time from time call received to time advocate arrives to the emergency department.
8. Provide hotline for adult sexual assault victims with appropriate healthcare facility choices for medical assessment and forensic examination when requested.
9. Provide information, emotional support and crisis intervention for adult sexual assault victims and their family members, and/or friends at the hospital.
10. Provide appropriate referrals and follow up care.
11. Provide follow-up intervention, peer support counseling and advocacy services for adult victims and family members as requested.
12. Provide ongoing process improvement information to the SART.

- III. The role of **Participating Law Enforcement Agencies** is, in their respective jurisdictions, to investigate reports of sexual assault. The decisions concerning the arrest of a perpetrator shall be based upon law and current department policy.

Participating Law Enforcement Agencies commit to:

1. Designate a liaison to serve as a resource person for the SART meetings.
2. Routinely share information among team members and provide information about case status as needed and as allowed by law.
3. Interview and interaction with adult victims.
  - a. The responding officer to a call of sexual assault should conduct the initial interview of the victim using a trauma-informed approach to gather information that is immediately necessary to determine evidence to collect, the identity of the perpetrator or possibly witnesses.
  - b. Officers will follow Texas Code of Criminal Procedure Article 56A.3515 regarding the presence of sexual assault program advocate or other victim's representative during law enforcement interview with a victim of sexual assault.
  - c. All interviews of the victim should be recorded when possible in accordance with department policies.
  - d. In accordance with Texas Code of Criminal Procedure Art. 58.102, victims may request use of a pseudonym and officer(s) should complete the appropriate form.
  - e. The investigating officer or detective should conduct any follow up interviews using a trauma-informed approach.
  - f. Ensure that while the case is being investigated that victims receive communication on the status of the case once every 60 days unless the victim indicates otherwise.
4. Receive forensic evidence that has been collected from the adult victim and/or suspect for approved forensic exams and ensure timely submission to the laboratory for forensic testing according to the time frame outlined by legislative mandates.
5. Participate in SART and community training activities as determined by the SART.
6. Provide training to patrol officers and detectives responding to sexual assaults on evidence collection and trauma-informed approach and establish policies to be implemented in responding to sexual assault calls and investigations.
  - a. Maintain current list of forensic nursing providers available to all officers responding to adult sexual assault
  - b. Ensure that the proper law enforcement referral for a medical/forensic examination is completed in any investigation where an adult victim is eligible for a medical/forensic examination and the adult victim is informed of where a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) can be accessed.

7. Collaborate with crime victim liaisons to meet adult victim needs regarding crime victim's rights, compensation and advocacy throughout investigation and prosecution.
8. Provide ongoing process improvement information to the SART.
9. File investigations with the District Attorney's Office in a timely manner with all evidence according to state laws and department protocols.
10. Maintain and share statistics on the number of adult cases reported to law enforcement and the number of those adult cases that involve drug-facilitated sexual assault, the incidence of predatory date rape, and sex trafficking.

IV. The role of **Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE)** and physicians with specialized training serve a critical function in the response and care of adult victims of sexual assault. These healthcare providers understand how trauma impacts individuals and respect the value of empowerment and choice as vital to recovery in the aftermath of sexual assault. Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners: Forensic Center of Excellence and Memorial Hermann Health System Forensic Nursing Services respond to adult victims of sexual violence within Brazoria County and are committed to providing high quality care and forensic evidence preservation while working with partner agencies to ensure the best interests of the victims.

**Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners** commit to:

1. Designate a liaison to serve as a resource person for the SART and MDT meetings.
2. Provide medical forensic exams to victims that experience sexual assault, domestic violence, trafficking, and child and elder abuse.
3. Collaborate with hospitals in Brazoria County to provide contracted forensic nursing services 24 hours a day, with an arrival time average of 90 minutes.
4. Provide acute and non-acute exams of victims of sexual and physical violence (TXFNE protocol - 7 days).
  - a. Acute exam - medical forensic exam completed, evidence is collected within 120 hours of incident
  - b. Non-acute - medical forensic exam completed, evidence is not collected
5. Conduct evidence collection when appropriate and with best practice standards.
6. Forensic photography will be conducted for all consenting patients that have a medical forensic exam and will be secured and stored in a HIPPA compliant manner.
7. Provide testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections and referral for chronic infections.
8. Patients needing medical forensic exams will have their exam conducted in their preferred language and with culturally specific considerations.
9. Patients will be identified utilizing their preferred pronouns and identities.
10. Provide medical records to law enforcement and the District Attorney's Office within two weeks of subpoena request.

11. Allow nurses to meet with the District Attorney's Office for pretrial conference meetings, ensure nurses maintain contact with the District Attorney's Office when a case is pending or in process for hearings or trial, and notify the District Attorney's Office of address and/or telephone number changes of any of the nurses.
12. Provide SANE education and precepting of SANE candidates and ensure all nurses maintain a high level of competency through ongoing education and case reviews that will apply to their certification renewal.
13. Agree to meet with the nursing team to discuss quality of care, peer and procedural review and provide ongoing process improvement information to the SART.
14. Maintain the availability of an Adult SANE specialist to provide adult medical forensic assessments at the following locations 24/7 with an average response time of 90 minutes:
  - a. HCA: Clear Lake
  - b. HCA: Texas City - Free-standing ER
  - c. HCA: Mainland
  - d. HCA: Pearland
  - e. HCA: Pearland - Free-standing ER
  - f. HCA: Southeast
  - g. CHI: Brazosport
  - h. CHI: Pasadena

**Memorial Hermann Forensic Nursing Services** provides holistic healthcare that addresses with dignity the physical, social, psychological, and spiritual needs of victims of interpersonal violence.

Memorial Hermann Forensic Nursing Services commit to:

1. Provide a trauma informed care response to adult sexual assault patients presenting at the SAFE ready designated Memorial Hermann Acute Care Hospitals:
  - a. Memorial Hermann Pearland Hospital
  - b. Memorial Hermann Southeast Hospital
  - c. Memorial Hermann Texas Medical Center Hospital
  - d. Memorial Hermann Southwest Hospital
  - e. Memorial Hermann Sugar Land Hospital
  - f. Memorial Hermann Memorial City Hospital
  - g. Memorial Hermann Greater Heights Hospital
  - h. Memorial Hermann Katy Hospital
  - i. Memorial Hermann Cypress Hospital
  - j. Memorial Hermann The Woodlands Hospital
  - k. Memorial Hermann Northeast Hospital

2. Provide 24/7 availability of SANEs to conduct medical/forensic assessments with evidence collection for sexual assault patients respecting all diverse and cultural needs.
3. Prioritize the physical and psychological well-being of patients who have experienced sexual assault by providing a safe and non-judgmental environment with an ongoing opportunity for informed consent throughout the medical/forensic comprehensive assessment, detailed injury documentation, and evidence preservation.
4. Encourage sexual assault patients to connect with available community advocates in a private space prior to conducting medical/forensic assessments while also respecting the patient's informed decision.
5. Memorial Hermann Healthcare providers assess the sexual assault patient for STI prophylaxis, HIV prophylaxis and Emergency Contraception according to CDC recommendations.
6. Educate on follow up, referral options, and complete a safe discharge plan for sexual assault patients to foster positive patient health outcomes.
7. Inform patients of Crime Victims Compensation sexual assault benefits.
8. Provide an exceptional individualized patient experience with evidence based quality care to the sexual assault patients.
9. Ensure high reliability with the identification, collection, documentation and preservation of evidence integrity.
10. Participate with the legal system by providing required trial testimony, adhering to institutional policy and procedures.
11. Collaborate with Brazoria County SART stakeholders for a trauma informed, compassionate, and victim- centered approach supporting healthy and safe communities.

## **Data Gathering and Evaluation Commitment**

To close gaps and decrease attrition of adult sexual assault cases through the Brazoria County criminal justice system, members of the SART will gather information on the prevalence of adult sexual assault by identifying the number of incidents reported to law enforcement, reports then referred for prosecution and the disposition of cases handled by the District Attorney's office. This information will assist to identify gaps that may be contributing to attrition and analyze current policies that may be negatively impacting the county-wide response to adult sexual assault.

Each agency will be responsible for quarterly reporting adult sexual assault information as follows:

### **I. Law Enforcement Agencies:**

- a. Any case involving sex trafficking
- b. All cases involving drug facilitated sexual assault (DFSA)
- c. Cases involving family violence sexual assault
- d. Number of sexual assault reports taken
- e. Number of delayed sexual assault reports taken with delayed defined by > than 120 hours from incident

- f. Number of sexual assault cases filed with the BCDAO
- g. Number of cases referred for a medical/forensic examination by a SANE

## II. **Brazoria County District Attorney's Office:**

- a. Any case involving sex trafficking
- b. All cases involving drug facilitated sexual assault (DFSA)
- c. Cases involving family violence sexual assault
- d. Number of sexual assault cases received from Law Enforcement
- e. Number of sexual assault cases indicted
- f. Number of sexual assault cases no billed or no action taken by the grand jury
- g. Number of sexual assault cases declined

## III. **Rape Crisis Center or Women's Center Agency of Brazoria County:**

- a. Any case involving sex trafficking
- b. All cases involving drug facilitated sexual assault (DFSA)
- c. Cases involving family violence sexual assault
- d. Number of new clients impacted by sexual assault
- e. Number of new clients impacted by sexual assault that reported to law enforcement
- f. Number of new clients impacted by sexual assault that **HAVE NOT** reported to law enforcement
- g. Number of clients accompanied during the sexual assault medical/forensic examination
- h. Number of clients accompanied during law enforcement sexual assault report

## IV. **Forensic Nursing Agencies:**

- a. Any case involving sex trafficking
- b. All cases involving drug facilitated sexual assault (DFSA)
- c. Cases involving family violence sexual assault
- d. Number of sexual assault exams conducted
- e. Number of sexual assault patients that accept or decline an advocate and when an advocate is not available
- f. Number of sexual assault patients that reported to law enforcement
- g. Number of sexual assault patients that **HAVE NOT** reported to law enforcement
- h. Average response time for SANE from time called received to arrival at care facility

*Information gathered from quarterly reporting will be reviewed bi-annually within the SART and presented to the Brazoria County Commissioner's Court in the Biennial Report to be completed by December 1<sup>st</sup> of each odd-numbered year.*

## **Case Reviews**

The SART commits to a biennial evaluation through adult sexual assault case reviews of the effectiveness of individual agency and interagency protocols and systems.

## **Training Commitment**

All members of the SART commit to attending at least four hours of annual cross-agency training on the dynamics of adult sexual assault for response team members participating in the quarterly meetings as required by Section 351.254(c).

## **Conflict Resolution**

It is important for SART members to be respectful and mindful of each other. Every SART member has a specific role and responsibility that may appear to be in conflict with those of another member. Be aware that each member is trying to balance the needs of their own agency, the community, and the adult victim. Creating a safe environment where each SART member can effectively communicate and solve problems is important for a victim-centered response. The SART must consistently ask themselves, "What is in the best interest of the adult victim?" Members will work to understand and consider the roles, responsibilities and limitations of other team members through meetings and networking.

## **Confidentiality:**

When information is shared among Brazoria County Adult SART members and affiliates, confidentiality will be maintained as required by law. Confidentiality of victim and survivor information will be preserved, and each individual agency will be responsible to maintain confidentiality of the victims they serve.

*This protocol is recognized as a cooperative, collaborative commitment between each agency listed below, and is proof of commitment as acknowledged by the signature of each agency's representative.*



# OUTLINE OF INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN

## Training

The Sexual Assault Response Team, since its formation, has done an excellent job at including a wide range of stakeholders for representation. Experts that play a key role in a trauma informed response to sexual assault incidents, from initial report through the conclusion of a court case and beyond, provide input and recommendations from their unique perspective. These pieces however, when put together as a whole process, can easily lead to confusion or disagreement on things such as definitions or procedures.

As a result, the Brazoria County SART has focused its quarterly training on a deeper dive into each agency that is represented. Each quarter a member of the board takes time to discuss the history of their organization, what service it is that they provide to victims of sexual assault, and how their agency and function plays a part of the overall process that the SART facilitates. This has not only allowed members to get to know one another better, but more importantly it helps everyone understand how all these various functions tie together to the "big picture".

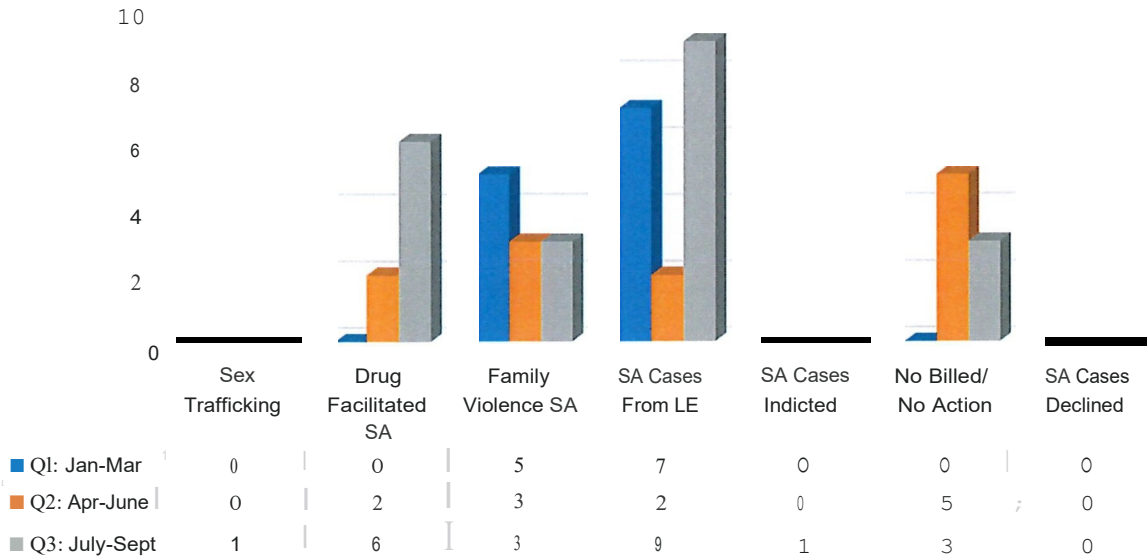
## Outreach

Since its formation, the SART has primarily been focused on its establishment and meeting the mandated deadlines. In May 2023, however, the team began outreach efforts to inform Brazoria County law enforcement agencies of the importance of the SART. Members Mary Aldous and Kathi Perkins provided an informational presentation to members of the Southeast Texas Police Chief's Association meeting, an organization with over 50 law enforcement administrators representing nearly 30 different law enforcement agencies throughout the region. The presentation explained the formation and purpose of the team, attempting to gain additional LE participation. Given that many community organizations are not aware of the existence of the SART, and their potential to serve as a valuable contributor to the team, this type of outreach will continue to be important and should be a priority for the SART moving forward.

# COMPILED DATA

## Brazoria County District Attorney's Office

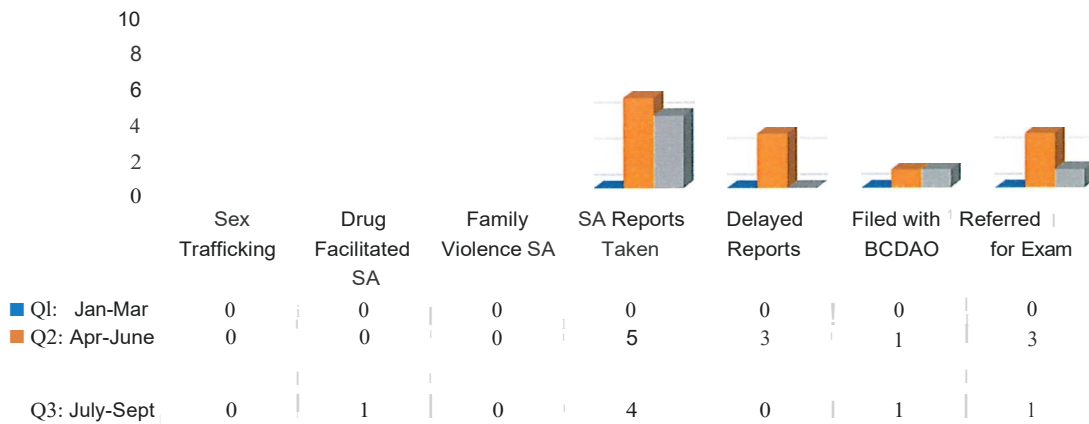
Brazoria County DA's Office - 2023



## Law Enforcement

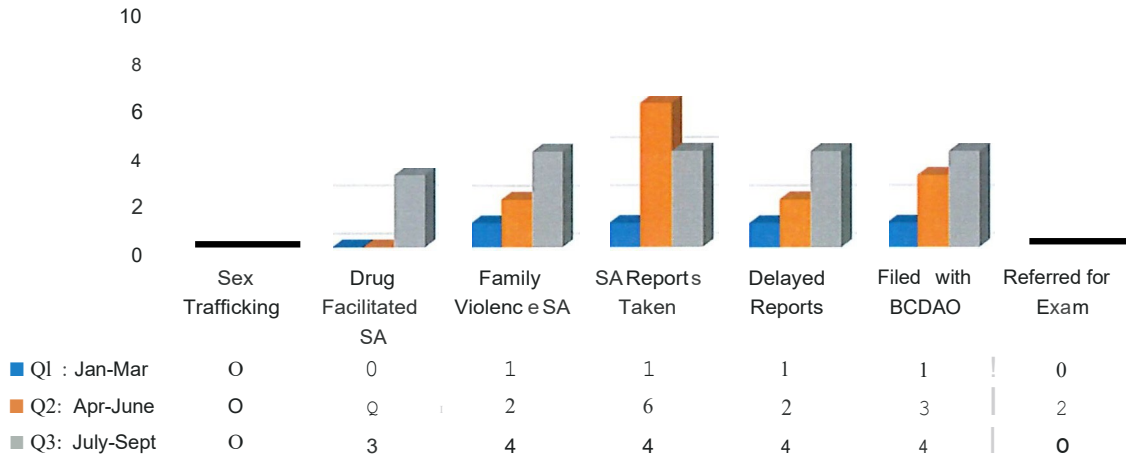
### Brazoria County Sheriff's Office

Brazoria County Sheriff's Office - 2023



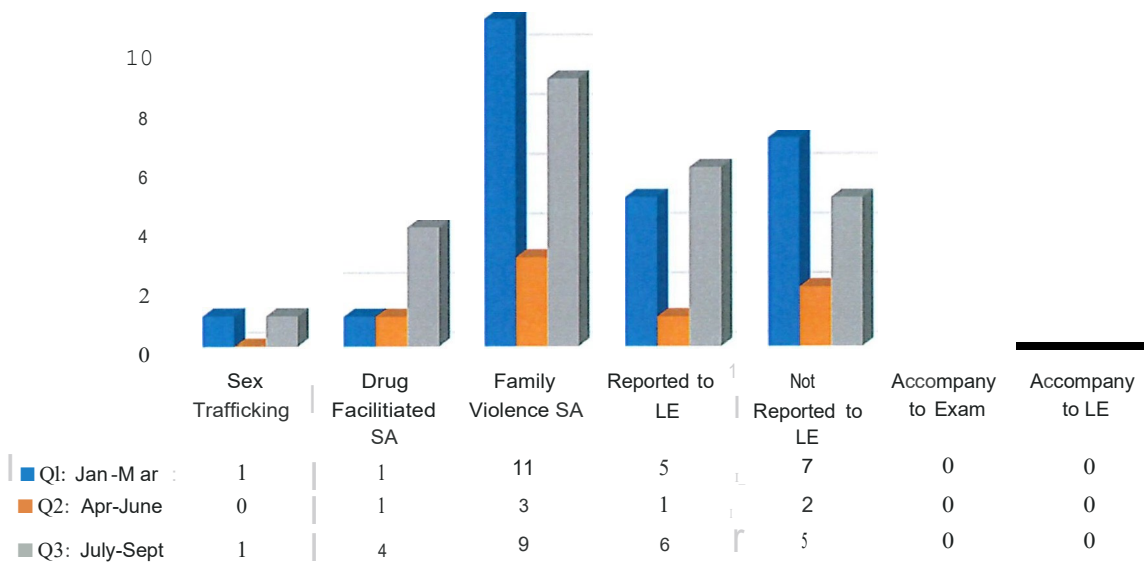
## Pearland Police Department

### Pearland Police Department - 2023



## Women's Center of Brazoria County

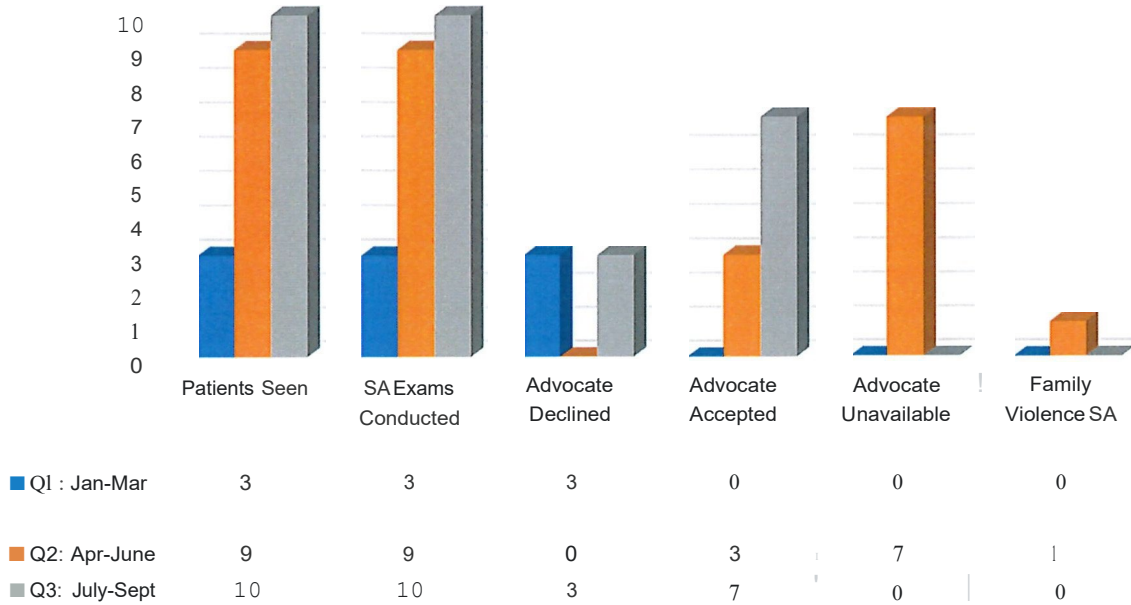
### Women's Center of Brazoria County - 2023



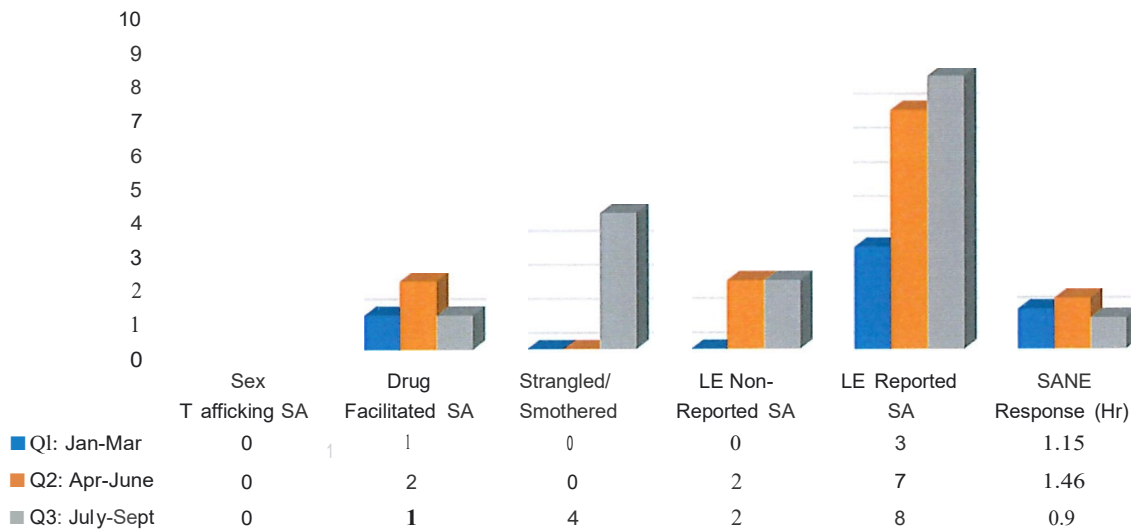
## Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE)

### Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners

TXFNE - 2023 (Chart 1 of 2)

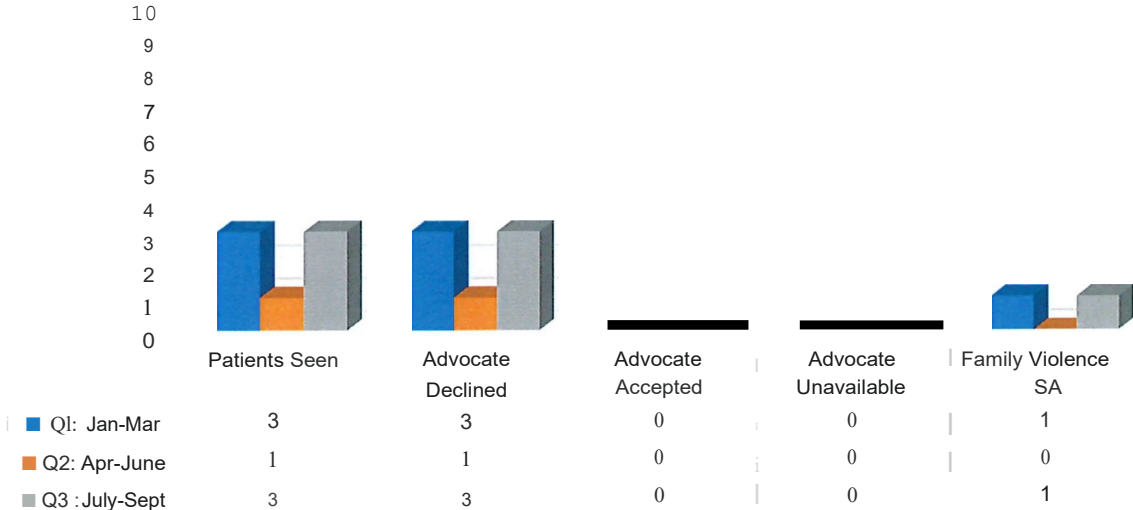


TXFNE - 2023 (Chart 2 of 2)

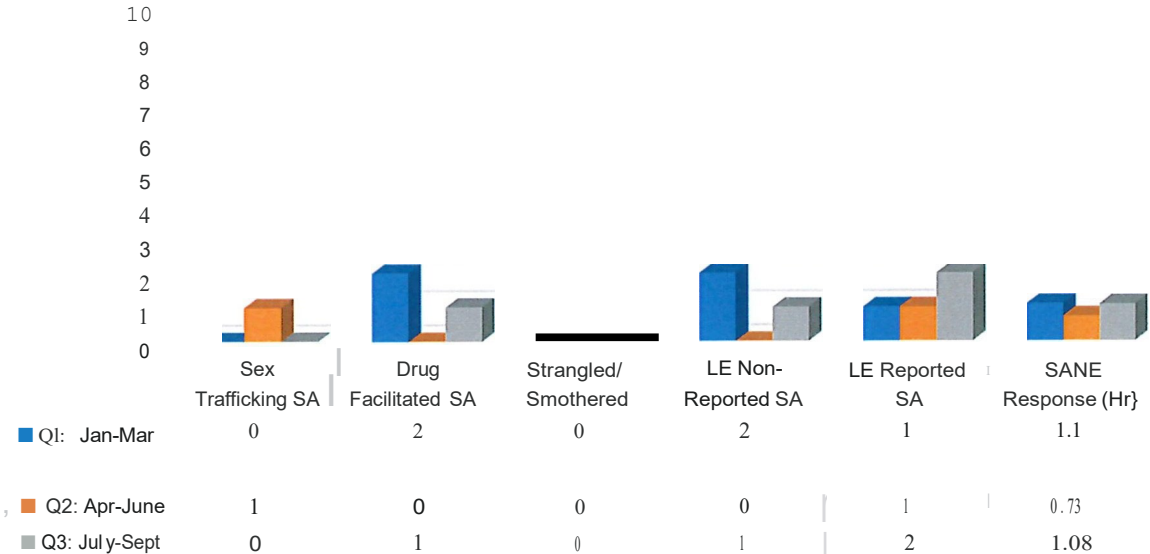


# Memorial Hermann Forensic Nursing Services

Memorial Hermann - 2023 (Chart 1 of 2)



Memorial Hermann - 2023 (Chart 2 of 2)



## Data Takeaways /Considerations

- Collected data only represents the first three quarters of 2023, following the completion of SART Protocols in December 2022.
- Drug Facilitated Sexual Assaults (DFSA) are considered to occur when it is determined that any mind-altering substance (alcohol, drugs, etc.) was reported to have attributed to the event.
- Brazoria County District Attorney's Office (BCDAO) statistics do not line up with respective quarterly report numbers by law enforcement entities, as the BCDAO data is representative of all agencies throughout the county and documented at the time the decision is made (often at the conclusion of the case and in a later quarter).
- Brazoria County DA's Office has zero cases declined, as all cases are forwarded to the Grand Jury for review and decision.
- Law Enforcement statistics throughout Brazoria County are an incomplete representation, as only two of the agencies (although they are the two largest agencies) are represented in the collected data.
- Nearly 50% of the Sexual Assault reports taken by Law Enforcement are classified as Delayed Reports, which is defined as more than 120 hours from the incident.
- Only approximately 25% of the victims are referred for a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) exam by Law Enforcement, likely due to being outside the window of evidence collection.
- The Brazoria County Women's Center reports that only 45% of new adult clients impacted by sexual assault had reported the incident to Law Enforcement, lending credit to the assumption that sexual assault incidents are underreported.
- Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners reported that nearly 45% of the adult sexual assault victims declined sexual assault advocates at the time of the examination.
- Nearly 25% of the patients seen by SANEs did not have an available advocate at the time of the exam, resulting in either follow-ups or other agencies providing resources.
- The average SANE response time is 1 hour and 4 minutes.
- Less than 10% of the SANE examinations conducted involved family violence, whereas 35% of the sexual assault reports taken by law enforcement included family violence.

## Case Review

The Brazoria County SART prioritizes the confidentiality of victims regarding their cases, and did not receive the signed, written consent of any survivor to review any specific case. The team does, however, thoroughly analyze the provided data quarterly to identify and address potential shortfalls in the procedures.

An example of this occurred during the third quarter meeting, when TXFNE reported that seven patients were not able to receive an advocate due to them being unavailable. This prompted a deeper dive into the statistics, which discovered that another agency was able to provide an advocate in one of those instances. Additionally, and arguably more importantly, it identified a need of more advocate resources, which has since been prioritized by the team and continues to serve as priority into 2024.

# CONCLUSION

Since its inception, the Brazoria County Adult SART has had a positive impact on the consolidation of limited resources for sexual assault response. Organizations that had previously worked independent of one another have since used the relationships and knowledge built over the last two years to refine policies and procedures for better overall care of sexual assault victims. Through these efforts, the team has provided a solid foundation for a wholesome, trauma informed response throughout the community.

Moving forward, the SART must build upon this foundation by expanding its efforts in education and outreach, as well as recruiting more agency representatives to be a part of the team. Education and outreach efforts should focus on not only informing the public of the SART's existence and purpose, but also the importance of reporting and providing assistance to sexual assault incidents. With the data supporting the theory that sexual assaults are underreported, and often delayed, the Brazoria County Adult SART should utilize this information to educate the various sexual assault response organizations throughout the community. Additionally, these organizations should be encouraged to utilize the data to educate the public through their own outlets.

With more data, the SART can ascertain a more accurate representation of the adult sexual assault incidents that occur within the county. This will not only allow the team to pinpoint areas of concern (both geographically and procedurally), but it will allow for better justification of additional resources identified. The best way to accomplish this is to recruit more agency representatives to be a part of the SART. This would ensure county-wide standardization in the procedures used to address sexual assaults, while also providing a true representation of the factors surrounding sexual assault throughout the community. While any agency related to sexual assault response should be included, law enforcement agencies seem to be the least represented statistically and should be the focus of recruitment efforts in 2024.

In its infancy, the Brazoria County Adult SART has made great strides in the county's efforts to provide a wholesome, trauma informed response to sexual assault. The team will continue to work to improve the treatment of adult sexual assault survivors with respect and compassion through trauma informed practices, and to promote the apprehension and prosecution of perpetrators.