

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Communities Foundation of Texas awards a groundbreaking
\$6 million grant to the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute
to help reduce the increasing number of children who die from
violence each year**

The grant will create the North Texas Handle With Care Network to identify and support at-risk children and families

DALLAS — [Communities Foundation of Texas](#) has awarded a \$6 million multi-year grant through the [W.W. Caruth, Jr., Fund](#) to the [Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute](#) to implement a comprehensive initiative that provides support to children and youth who have witnessed or experienced violence or other crimes.

The award enables the creation of the [North Texas Handle With Care Network](#) to help identify at-risk children and their families who have experienced violence and connect them to community health services that can improve their mental health and mitigate the psychological harm and risk of suicide that can occur from exposure to violence. Handle with Care (HWC) is a national model that was first piloted in 2013 and has been replicated across the country.

Through HWC, if a school-age child is part of a police response, law enforcement can notify the child's school district that they should be "handled with care." No information about the event is shared with the school, but school staff are trained on warning signs that may indicate the child is in distress and help connect the child to appropriate care.

Over the next three years, the grant will allow the Meadows Institute to catalyze and design a HWC program that supports the most vulnerable students in partnership and collaboration with school districts, law enforcement, and community mental health providers in Dallas County and North Texas.

The first two school districts to participate in the program are Irving and Richardson, with a combined enrollment of more than 69,000 students. Both districts began the initial rollout of the program in January 2025.

Early intervention can mitigate the long-term effects of violence exposure and loss, ultimately leading to improved mental health, safety, and well-being. By building capacity among community partners, the North Texas Handle With Care Network will strengthen efforts to support children before they reach a moment of crisis.

“The North Texas Handle With Care Network is a game-changer for how our community helps children who have experienced trauma,” said Robert Kent, chief philanthropy officer at Communities Foundation of Texas. “By helping schools quickly collaborate with behavioral health providers and public safety officials, children will receive the support and services they need at the right time, leading to better outcomes for youth, their families, and our community.”

“This generous grant from Communities Foundation of Texas will allow the Meadows Institute to systematically address child mortality from violence and suicide, starting first with North Texas,” said Andy Keller, president and CEO of the Meadows Institute. “The opportunity to expand access to treatment and services for students who have experienced trauma supports our mission to create systemic changes that allow anyone to obtain the health care they need.”

Dallas County and Texas statistics:

- In Texas, the number of children and youth who died by homicide and suicide more than doubled between 2010 and 2020, with a 22% increase from 2019 to 2020 alone.
- In 2022, deaths from homicide and suicide were the second and third leading causes of death among Texas children and youth, respectively. Only accidents claim more lives.
- Dallas County saw a 29% increase in reported violent deaths between 2021 and 2022 among children and youth— far above the 6% increase across Texas statewide.

In recent years, the Texas Legislature has made substantial investments to improve access to mental health services for youth. This culminated in 2023 with a historic funding increase for the mental health system that included \$11.68 billion for behavioral health funding. These investments have funded critical community-services for North Texas, allowing for youth to be connected through the Handle With Care Network.

“The Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute has provided exceptional training for our school counselors and At-Risk Department in addressing trauma and grief with our most vulnerable students,” said Sofia Lopez, the director of At-Risk and Responsive Services at the Irving Independent School District.

“The Handle With Care program has helped us with the early identification of students who might be in distress following a traumatic event, and teachers have received the tools needed to address students in compassionate ways. The Handle With Care Specialist will provide the support families need after a traumatic event by connecting them to community resources.”

This initiative builds on an initial Handle With Care pilot program funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, with additional generous support from the Kozmetsky Family Foundation.

MEADOWS MENTAL HEALTH POLICY INSTITUTE

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About the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute

Independent and nonpartisan, the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute works at the intersection of policy and programs to create equitable systemic changes so all people in Texas, the nation, and the world can obtain the health care they need. The Meadows Institute provides state and national leaders with trusted data-driven policy and program guidance and works to shift the focus of new investments toward early intervention for children and families and address the mental health crisis in our jails and emergency rooms. By advancing improvements in critical areas such as trauma and grief, the expansion of the mental health workforce, health equity, and innovation, we are leading the effort to help all people with mental health needs recover and be well. Learn more at <https://mmhpi.org>.

About Communities Foundation of Texas

The mission of Communities Foundation of Texas (CFT) is to improve the lives of all people in our community by investing in their health, wealth, living, and learning. CFT works to accomplish this by growing community giving, expanding community impact, and advancing community equity. With a vision of building thriving communities for all, CFT works locally and across the state with many individuals, families, companies, foundations, and nonprofits through a variety of charitable funds and strategic grantmaking initiatives. CFT professionally manages more than 1,300 charitable funds and has awarded more than \$2.6 billion in grants since its founding in 1953.

CFT is committed to serving and understanding donor needs, expertly handling complex gifts, wisely managing charitable funds, and leveraging its community knowledge to increase charitable impact, in addition to powering several initiatives including the W. W. Caruth, Jr. Fund at CFT, CFT's Center for Business Impact, Educate Texas at CFT, Emerging Leaders in Philanthropy at CFT, GiveWisely, and CFT's North Texas Giving Day. CFT's North Texas Giving Day raised \$70 million on a single day in 2024 to help over 3,200 North Texas nonprofits. Learn more at CFTexas.org.

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