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Letter to the Citizens of San Augustine County;

Welcome to San Augustine County Commissioners Court! Today's agenda includes a formal presentation of documents from Stephen F. Austin State University, the acquisition and transfer of a HUD building, and the title transfer of a van. However, the items on this agenda are really about changing lives, and ultimately changing our county's economic future.

The documents that are being presented this morning have been made possible by Stephen F. Austin's comprehensive outreach program that fostered the School of Social Work's desire to aide us in identifying and professionally documenting the needs and strengths of our county.

Today, the court will take action on an incredible building that has enough space to house Social Service Agencies that do not have a physical presence in our county. We will also be talking about a neighboring county that reached their hand out across county borders in a selfless act of generosity.

TO BE CLEAR, in the context of today's agenda, the "Social Services" we refer to is actually an umbrella of resources that includes training and educational programs that give un-employed or under employed residents the tools they need to secure and retain good paying jobs; a permanent location where indigent elderly can receive assistance interfacing with state and federal programs that provide their basic life needs; a place where nutrition and wellness programs will help low income families stabilize their children's health, and dozens of other programs designed to make our county a better place to live and be successful.

To better understand the accomplishments – and perhaps I should also say miracle - of today we have prepared a brief timeline of events to give you a better understanding of the true magnitude and importance of these projects.

### **January, 2011**

Almost from day one, our office began to receive requests from residents who were in desperate need of emergency assistance.

As per our requests, we began searching our files for referral information in an effort to find resources for those coming to us for help. We ultimately found a single tri-fold pamphlet with the names and contact numbers of social service agencies that were listed as providing assistance to Shelby, Sabine and San Augustine Counties.

As we began verifying the numbers listed in the pamphlet however, we soon discovered that much of the information was incorrect, or that an agency shown to be a resource, no longer served our county.

### **February 2011**

Various Social Service providers began calling or coming by our office to say hello, and to give us basic information on their agency's services. However, as we began to compile the new data and become more familiar with available resources, we grew increasingly alarmed by the lack of actual facilities within our county.

### **September, 2011**

During a San Augustine CPS board meeting, I expressed my concern to the board regarding the continuing lack of referral and in-county resources. I asked the members of the board if they had suggestions on where we could seek help or get advice.

The following week, Brandi Kolander-Neeb, a CPS representative, met with a core group of board members and me to discuss our concerns and possible options for gaining a clearer understanding of our social services issues.

During that meeting, it was decided that Brandi would hand carry a letter from my office to Dr. Emmerentie Oliphant, of SFA's School of Social Work.

## **November, 2011**

Our first meeting with Dr. Oliphant, Becky Price-Mayo, Brandi Kolander and various CPS Managers and representatives was held in the San Augustine County courtroom.

## **December, 2011 to March, 2012**

A series of ongoing conference calls and group meetings were held with various regional and state social service representatives and our new SFA partners.

## **March 2, 2012**

Dr. Emmerentie Oliphant, and a number of her MSW students, Dr. Steve Cooper, Becky Price-Mayo and Dr. Darrel McDonald, GSI of Stephen F. Austin University joined with the county team to conduct a Social Service Needs Assessment Workshop in the Museum Theater. The all-day event attendees included representatives from service agencies, health care providers, area ministers, community leaders, volunteers by the dozen, elected officials and law enforcement representatives.

## **March, 2012**

Mr. James Williams, a San Augustinian with strong ties to Washington decision makers became interested in our social service difficulties, and contacted his governmental colleagues asking for their suggestions on ways to address our counties longstanding and complicated Social Service need problems.

As a direct result of Mr. Williams' intercession on our behalf, our office received an email from one of our new found Washington resources inviting me to join a conference call with a variety of agency officials sometime in April, 2012 to discuss our perceived, but undocumented Social Service problems.

Upon receiving the conference call invitation, I contacted Dr. Oliphant to advise her of the opportunity, and asked if she and Becky Price-Mayo would be available to participate. It was decided I would come to the School of Social Work, accompanied by the Project Manager Brittney Johnson to take the call, along with Dr. Oliphant, Becky Price-Mayo, and additional SFA support faculty.

## **April to October, 2012**

Following the April conference call with governmental officials, Dr. Oliphant began preparing the necessary documents needed for our county-wide Social Service Needs Assessment project

The on-going work sessions culminated in the development and implementation of a major meeting on October 29, 2012 with our Regional State and Federal partners; Derek Lee, Aging Services Program Specialist, ACL/ORO/RSC6, Elma Goodwin, Management & Program Analyst, Immediate Office of the Regional Administrator, ACF, Hernan Reyes, M.D., Capt., US Public Health Service Deputy Regional Administrator, Health Resources and Services Administration, Jonathan Sanchez Leos, Public Health Advisor, Presidential Management Fellow, SAMHSA, Michael Duffy, Regional Administrator-Region VI, SAMHSA, Leon McCowan, Regional Administrator-Region VI, Administration for Children and Families (ACF), and Philander Moore, Unit Manager, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Texas Department of State Health Services, SFA School of Social Work faculty, staff members and graduate students, representatives from State and Federal elected officials, elected county officials and department heads, service provider agencies, community leaders, and volunteers from across the county.

The Social Service Needs Assessment data collected during the SFA Research Café, along with the irrefutable information gathered from the October 29<sup>th</sup> meeting was heartbreakingly clear. San Augustine County has been unable to fully access the majority of Social Services that would have been available to our county simply because we were not able to provide an acceptable place to house those resources.

After the daylong meeting, a core group from SFA, and county team members met with our Regional, State and Federal agency visitors for dinner and an informal round table discussion. We learned how other low-income communities had been highly successful in locating unused buildings, putting together a project plan to rehab the building, and seeking grant funding to underwrite the project. It was recommended that we consider following such a plan of action.

## **November, 2012 to present**

It is not necessary to fully outline the work or strategy that has gone into the county's successful bid to procure the note on the HUD facility. In the interest of brevity, I will simply tell you that we submitted a comprehensive outline of our proposed project, along with fully documented

overview of our county's demographics and social service needs that was generated from the preliminary data taken from our SFA Social Service Needs Assessment study. There can be no doubt that the SFA generated documents gave us the data and "the words" that were necessary to win this bid.

When we were first learned that our bid for the HUD building was being seriously considered, I called Mr. George Simon, Executive Director of Tri-County Community Action, Inc. We met, and immediately begin discussions about how we could best work together on this monumental project. It was obvious that the county lacked the expertise, personnel and financial resources to properly administer the necessary programs.

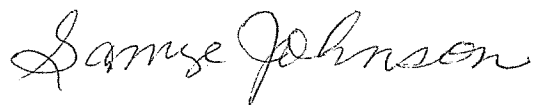
From the county's perspective, the mandate of Tri-County's service mission fit perfectly within the guidelines of the plan we submitted to HUD. Further, we felt the proposed collaboration would be to the benefit of all concerned.

As a result of our deliberations, Mr. Simon successfully presented our proposed joint project to the Tri County board for their consideration and ultimate approval. Tri County is a community action agency, whose sole purpose is to help people to become self-sufficient through skill and training development, continuing education programs, financial & budget training and partnerships with other agencies to transition individual out of poverty.

### **A Gift of Love**

In October, 2013 Houston County Judge Erin Ford called to tell us that their court had just voted to give San Augustine County one of their three 18 passenger vans, free and clear with no strings attached! In the true spirit of "Pass it On", just as we received our gift, it will be passed on to Tri County, free and clear with no strings attached!

Respectfully submitted:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Samse Johnson".