

## 2008 Travis County Child Fatality Review Team

### **Austin Police Department**

Jeff Hampton, Lieutenant – Child Abuse  
Pat Cochran, Sergeant – Child Abuse  
Brian Loyd, Sergeant – Child Abuse  
Mark Spangler, Lieutenant – Homicide  
Hector Reveles, Sergeant – Homicide  
Joseph Chacon, Sergeant – Homicide  
Brian Gretzner, Lieutenant – Vehicular Homicide  
Kris Thompson, Sergeant – Vehicular Homicide  
Melissa Atwood, Victim Services  
Dolores Litton, Victim Services

### **Austin/Travis County EMS**

Jim Allday, Clinical Coordinator  
Jason Martin

### **Austin/Travis County Health & Human Services**

Doug Ballew, Injury Prevention Program  
Raquel Moreno, Registrar of Vital Statistics

### **Center for Child Protection**

Sandra A. Martin, Chief Executive Officer  
Amanda Van Hoozer, Director of Program Services  
Barbara Jefferson, Clinical Director  
Collin Cook, Program Coordinator  
Dan McClellan, Volunteer

### **Community Professionals**

Robert Hendee, Jr., MD  
Beth Nauert, MD

### **Dell Children's Medical Center of Central Texas**

George Edwards, MD  
Pat Hodges, MD  
Karla Lawson, Trauma Services  
Tareka Wheeler, Safe Kids Austin

### **Lakeway Police Department**

Ricky Gavit, Detective

### **Pflugerville Police Department**

Chet Vronka, Corporal

### **Texas Department of Family and Protective Services**

Daniel Estabrook, Supervisor  
Kris Mason, Supervisor

### **Texas Department of Public Safety**

Rhonda Gildcrest, Victim Services

### **Texas Parks & Wildlife Department**

Robert Goodrich, Captain

### **Travis County District Attorney's Office**

LaRu Woody, ADA  
Dayna Blazey, ADA  
Ann O'Connell, ADA  
Stephanie McFarland, ADA  
Missy Martinez, Legal Assistant  
Rhonda Salinas, Legal Assistant

### **Travis County Medical Examiner's Office**

David Dolinak, MD  
Leanne Courtney, RN  
Robin Dwyer, RN

### **Travis County Sheriff's Office**

Robert Mills, Lieutenant, Major Crimes  
Bryce Miller, Sergeant, Child Abuse  
Stan Roper, Sergeant, Major Crimes  
Connie Geerhart, Victim Services

# Travis County Child Fatality Review Team

## 2008 Annual Report

*The Travis County Child Fatality Review Team would like to give special thanks to Dan McClellan for compiling the statistics used within this report.*



April 2009. The Center for Child Protection, an accredited children's advocacy center, is the first stop for children in Travis County who are suspected victims of sexual abuse, serious physical abuse and for children who have witnessed a violent crime. The Center is the only nonprofit in Travis County involved in the investigation of crimes against children. In 2008, the Center served 1,547 children and 1,351 adults. All services are provided at no charge to children and families.



## Letter from the Travis County Child Fatality Review Team Chair

Last year, 139 Travis County children lost their lives. A percentage of these deaths are considered “Natural”; the result of prematurity, disease and infection, and not considered preventable even if their outcome is inevitable. The focus of the Child Fatality Review Team is the other percentage of deaths; the homicides and suicides and the accidents that did not have to happen. These are children who did not have to die.

We come to you this year with a focus on specific types of death. Specifically, our attention is on asphyxia or suffocation deaths. As you read in our report, there were 17 deaths that make up over 50% of the “Accidental” deaths this year. Fourteen of these children were under the age of one. All were in unsafe sleeping environments that included bed-sharing and adult bedding. It is important to note that this trend is continuing in 2009. A community coalition has formed to begin looking at these deaths and the educational process for parents. We urge the community to share this information with their friends and family, and with their peers and other professionals. Our goal is to change this trend in years to come.

In 2008, of the 33 “Accidental” deaths, six were related to drowning. Children died in community pools, open water and bathtubs. These six deaths represent a three-fold increase over last year. Water safety education and supervision are critical in reversing this trend.

Finally, in 2008, two statistics remained the same. Although these numbers are not currently increasing, 13 lost lives forever change the makeup of our community and their losses are deeply felt by their families and friends. Motor vehicle accidents claimed the lives of nine children; six as passengers in cars, three as pedestrians hit by cars. Three of the six child passengers were not using restraints at the time of death. Two children lost their lives as the result of accidents where an adult driver was using alcohol or drugs. Four children died as a result of suicide. Our review indicates that many of the youth that take their own lives were facing problems that they perceived to have a long-term impact on their lives. Their action is permanent and tragic. Awareness and involvement are important for teens transitioning into adulthood. We encourage caregivers to act and seek out help for their adolescents if there are concerns about their child.

The Child Fatality Review Team requires the help of our community leaders, medical and social service professionals as well as parents, grandparents and the community at large in spreading these recommendations to parents in our community to stop the needless loss of more young lives.



Dayna Blazey  
Assistant District Attorney  
Travis County Child Fatality Review Team Chair

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In 2008, Travis County recorded 139 child fatalities, which is higher than deaths reported the previous year (125). The annual average since 1996 is 127 deaths. Children who died in Travis County ranged in age from pre-term infants to 17.

### Manner of Death

Since 1996, the Travis County Child Fatality Review Team has recorded data on the causes of death of children. Of the 139 deaths on record in 2008, a majority (96) were due to natural causes. Smaller numbers were reported for accidental deaths (33), undetermined causes (5), suicide (4), and homicides (1).

### Natural Causes

A total of 96 children died in Travis County in 2008 due to natural causes. Of those deaths, 43 were caused by prematurity, 40 from congenital defects, 2 from infection, 3 from malignancies, 6 unknown, and 2 from other causes. These numbers track very closely to those reported last year.

### Accidental Deaths

In 2008, Travis County experienced an increase in the number of children dying from accidental causes. The 33 accidental deaths rose dramatically from the 19 reported the previous year. Of the accidental deaths documented last year, children died as a result of asphyxiation (17), motor vehicle accidents (9), drowning (6), and other accidents (1).

The largest category of accidental child deaths was from suffocation or asphyxiation. Seventeen children died of asphyxiation in 2008, a dramatic increase from the 2007 total of 7 deaths. Asphyxia superseded motor vehicle accidents as the largest accidental cause of death only once before – in 2006, when 17 deaths were reported. Of the deaths in 2008, 14 were infants who died while sleeping in unsafe sleeping arrangements; three suffocated from other causes.

The second largest number of accidental child deaths (9) were caused by motor vehicle accidents. The same number of deaths were reported in 2007, but it is a decline from the 13 children killed in motor vehicle accidents in 2006 and below the county’s annual average of 12 over the last decade. Of those accidents, 6 involved children as passengers in motor vehicles and 3 were auto-pedestrian accidents. Of the 9 children who died in motor vehicle accidents, 7 were teenagers. Five Anglo children, 3 Hispanic, and 1 African American child were represented as motor vehicle accident victims, which is unusually consistent with local demographics. They were almost evenly split by gender with 5 male and 4 female victims. Of the passenger-related auto accidents, 3

were properly restrained with a seatbelt or child safety seat; 3 were unrestrained.

Fewer children died from drowning (6), but the number still represents an increase from the previous year (2). These children died in pools, open water, and bathtubs.

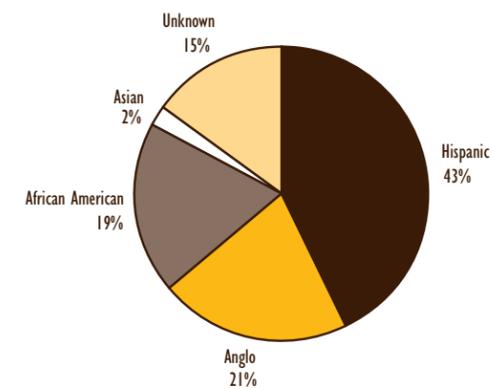
### Child Homicides

In 2008, 1 child death was ruled a homicide, which is the lowest number reported in 12 years and well below the county’s average of 5. This death was not the result of abuse.

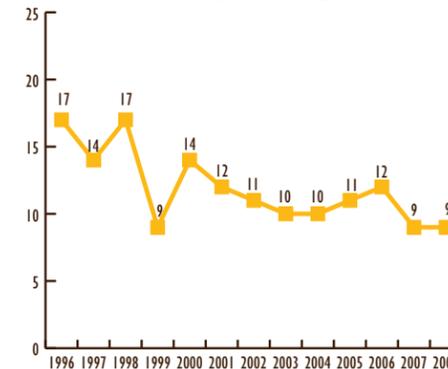
### Child Suicide

In 2008, there were four suicides, which was the same number reported the previous year. Still it was twice the annual child suicide rate of between one or two over the last 12 years. The victims ranged in age from 14- to 17-years-old.

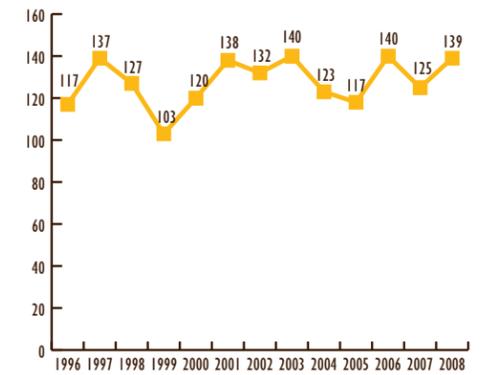
Race/Ethnicity of all Child Deaths in Travis County: 2008



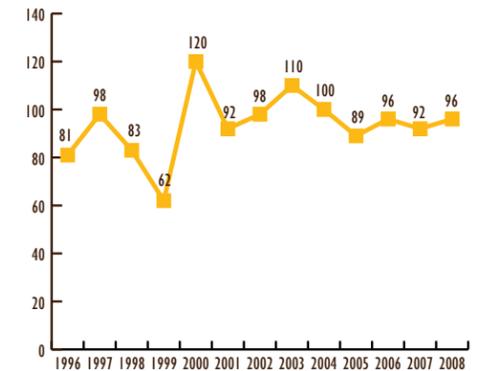
Child Deaths in Travis County Due to Motor Vehicle Accidents: 1996-2008



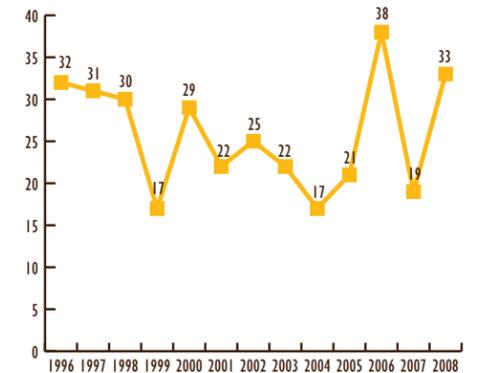
Total Child Fatalities in Travis County: 1996-2008



Natural Child Deaths in Travis County: 1996-2008



Accidental Child Deaths in Travis County: 1996-2008



Child Deaths in Travis County Due to Asphyxia: 1996-2008

