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## **Texoma Council of Governments Receives National Association of Development Organizations 2019 Impact Award**

**WASHINGTON, DC – Texoma Council of Governments, based in Sherman, Texas, has received three 2019 Aliceann Wohlbruck Impact Awards from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) for collaborative initiatives including: *Texoma Behavioral Health Leadership Team, Getting Ahead, and Fannin County Food Project.***

### Texoma Behavioral Health Leadership Team

Qualitative and quantitative data analyzed by TCOG in order to identify and address root causes of poverty in Texoma revealed that access to mental healthcare is a top need in the Texoma region.

Recognizing the negative impact that limited access to adequate behavioral healthcare has on the local economy and its relation to impoverished families, TCOG joined a collaborative effort by safety-net community leaders and representatives in the Grayson County area of North Texas to form the Texoma Behavioral Health Leadership Team (TBHLT). The TBHLT is committed to improving the behavioral health and well-being for all people who reside in the region. In this role, the TBHLT envisions a region where people live and thrive in communities that promote and support behavioral health and wellness.

Members represent a wide-spectrum of services, projects and partners who are invested in assuring that all regional residents have the opportunity for a healthy and happy life. Members of this project include leaders from the judicial system, law enforcement, area businesses, schools, colleges, emergency healthcare, behavioral health services, funders and caregivers.

Currently, the TBHLT is committed to promoting behavioral health in Texoma through the following initiatives: Access to Care, Stigma Reduction, and Jail Diversion.

TCOG leadership provided critical support in the formation of the TBHLT and continues to provide organizational support by allocating resources in the development of the TBHLT's communication strategies including website, social media and resource/collateral development,

and direct support in removing the image of what a person looks like experiencing mental health issues as that is a critical component to meeting the needs of improved behavioral health in Texoma.

Furthermore, TCOG serves functionally in the development of workplace inclusion strategies to encourage the implementation of comprehensive employee assistance programs and mental health first aid training by employers for their workers in all industries within the community.

### Getting Ahead

Poverty in the Texoma area, that includes Grayson, Fannin and Cook County, hovers at 13.4%, higher than the national average. While unemployment remains low, many struggle to make ends meet due to lack of affordable housing, scarce public transportation, and wage scales below livable levels. Poverty is especially prevalent among single parent households, the elderly and people of color.

Texoma Council of Governments (TCOG) provides needs-based support in many forms, including subsidized housing, utility assistance, case management, etc., but empowerment programs that actually help individuals and families overcome poverty remain scarce. In March 2017, TCOG launched Getting Ahead in a Just Gettin'-by-World, a new program in partnership with MasterKey Ministries of Grayson County, designed to help impoverished individuals living in unstable situations build economic stability for themselves, and in doing so affect a better future for the communities TCOG serves.

Getting Ahead is a 16-week program based on aha Process!' Bridges Out of Poverty framework that leads participants (called Investigators) on a journey to understand the causes of poverty and learn the resources needed for stability (including not just financial, but emotional, mental, physical, support systems, motivation and persistence, and others). Investigators take a deep and personal inventory of their current resources and those of their community and learn abstract thinking needed for goal-setting and planning for a better future story.

Getting Ahead helps participants learn to step out of "tyranny of the moment" thinking in which a multitude of problems demand their attention daily. This experience traps low-income individuals in the world of stress and hopelessness with no time to plan for their future. From day one, Investigators apply this newly learned method of thinking so that they improve their ability to make well-thought out decisions and consider critical possibilities.

Getting Ahead classes are limited to 12 participants and facilitated by 2 or 3 certified facilitators who guide the class through critical thinking skills and their own investigation of the roles language (formal and casual), time management, hidden rules of class, and social capital play in escaping poverty to succeed in middle class and wealth cultures. It brings the community into the class, with businesses, organizations and selected individuals bringing meals on class night and getting to know investigators and their children, and participating in a Community Assessment night where investigators quiz local experts about community resources.

### Fannin County Food Project

The objective of the Fannin County Food Project is to provide food assistance to food-deprived or food-insecure individuals. As determined through phone call statistics and community needs assessment plans, Fannin County (NE Texas) has a great need for food assistance. This project has prompted new collaborations with existing food pantries, other food assistance entities, and community entities/individuals with similar goals and vision. Most notably, the North Texas Food Bank's Mobile Pantry unit has made a great commitment to provide fresh produce to the residents of Fannin County.

Texoma Council of Governments (TCOG) served as a convening conduit of stakeholders in the project and facilitated the planning meetings for the development of the Fannin County Food Project. Our facilitation provided a means to develop and implement transportation mechanisms with partner agencies to and from the distribution site for individuals with identified needs.

The first major mobile produce distribution reached 170 households (approximately 426 individuals). This project established multiple distribution sites within Fannin County and a fixed transportation mechanism for individuals who would otherwise be unable to attend the distribution events.

NADO is a Washington, DC-based membership association of regional development organizations that promote programs and policies that strengthen local governments, communities, and economies through regional cooperation, program delivery, and comprehensive strategies. The association's Impact Awards program recognizes regional development organizations and their partners for improving the economic and community competitiveness of our nation's regions and local communities.

Award-winning projects were honored during NADO's 2019 Annual Training Conference, held October 19-22 in Reno, NV. The 2019 class of award recipients consists of 100 projects from 66 organizations spanning 24 states. These projects are presented in an interactive "Story Map" developed by NADO and CivicLens that includes project summaries and partners. The Story Map is available online at: <https://www.nado.org/impactawards/>.

"The Aliceann Wohlbruck Impact Awards program is an opportunity each year for NADO to publicly recognize the important services that regional development organizations deliver to their local communities," said 2018-2019 NADO President Scott Koons, executive director of the North Central Florida Regional Planning Council, located in Gainesville. "The projects awarded have made significant impacts on their regions and demonstrate the diversity of programs and resources provided by regional development organizations across the country."

The NADO Impact Awards are presented in honor of the late Aliceann Wohlbruck who was NADO's first executive director and served 24 years as a tireless champion for regional approaches to economic development in rural communities.

For more information about these award-winning projects, contact Sean Norton, Public Information & Media Manager, (903) 813-3514 or snorton@tcog.com.

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*Since 1967 the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) has provided advocacy, education, networking, and research for the national network of 540 regional development organizations. NADO members provide professional, programmatic, and technical assistance to over 2,300 counties and 15,000 municipalities.*

*The Texoma Council of Governments is a voluntary association of the local governments in Cooke, Fannin, and Grayson Counties. Established in 1968, the Texoma Council of Governments promotes economy and efficiency in the coordinated planning and development of the tri-county region through its community and economic development activities. Either directly, or through contractors, the Council provides housing, utility assistance, and weatherization services for low-income citizens in the region and assists the elderly through a variety of Area Agency on Aging programs. The Council also facilitates the delivery of grant funding for homeland security and criminal justice.*