

When she was in middle and high school, Dr. Courtney Harvey rode the bus often in her hometown of Corpus Christi. On the bus, people would sit next to her and tell her about all kinds of problems they were having.

“I’m really an introvert. I was kind of put off by that,” Dr. Harvey said. “But I started to think over time, maybe there’s something to this if people are saying or feeling like they can talk to [me].”

That’s when her path to becoming the Associate Commissioner for the Office of Mental Health Coordination within the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) began.

Those experiences on the bus, coupled with her family’s discussions of leading a purpose-driven life, took her to New Orleans where Dr. Harvey completed her bachelor’s in psychology at Dillard University.



*Dr. Harvey being awarded a key to the City of Corpus Christi, 2017*

Initially, Dr. Harvey wanted to become a child psychologist specializing in IDD and go into academia. She got her master’s and Ph.D. from Texas A&M Corpus Christi. During her studies, another path in psychology caught her interest.

“In the psych department, I also was required to take a few counseling courses,” Dr. Harvey said. “When I was taking those counseling courses, I had an instructor say to me, ‘are you sure you want to be a psychologist? You don’t really have that kind of personality.’”

The instructor suggested Dr. Harvey give counseling a try. She loved the counseling material, and around that time also started working at an LMHA. Her first job was working for a TCOOMMI program.

“I was around mental health professionals that weren’t necessarily psychologists,” Dr. Harvey said. “I was around licensed clinical social workers and licensed professional counselors and it really just gave me a different perspective on what mental health professionals can do.”

Dr. Harvey decided she wanted to go into counseling and got her Ph.D. so she could become a professor. While working at the LMHA, Dr. Harvey was running an outpatient competency restoration program and would work with her state representative to help educate people about the benefits of the program. That representative suggested Dr. Harvey explore jobs with HHSC, which was called the Department of State Health Services at the time.

“I had not really ever considered a career in state government. I did not even know that that was something that someone like me could do,” Dr. Harvey said.

She took the opportunity to apply and was hired to work in the mental health and substance abuse division overseeing outpatient competency restoration and jail-based competency restoration programs. Dr. Harvey continued to rise in the agency, becoming a team



*Dr. Harvey, Erica Haller-Stevenson, and an attendee at the 2019 Community Resource Coordination Groups and Texas System of Care Conference*

lead and then a manager over crisis services. Her next step was to become the HHSC Forensic Director and now, the Associate Commissioner for the Office of Mental Health Coordination.

“What I find the most rewarding is being able to transform the lives of people through policy work, through program development,” Dr. Harvey said.

Going from working directly with clients to working in policy and program development was a change for Dr. Harvey. At first, she struggled to see the impact, but her perspective evolved.

“Over time, as I started to learn more, at least about Health and Human Services, it's like, ‘Oh, this is really helpful,’” Dr. Harvey said. “This is how the clients get the services.”



*Dr. Harvey, Dr. Jennie Simpson, and Trina Ita at the 2021 JCMH Mental Health Summit*

[The Office of Mental Health Coordination](#) has been around for eight years. It started with one full-time employee and now has 30. That first employee was legislatively directed to coordinate mental health services in the publicly funded mental health system.

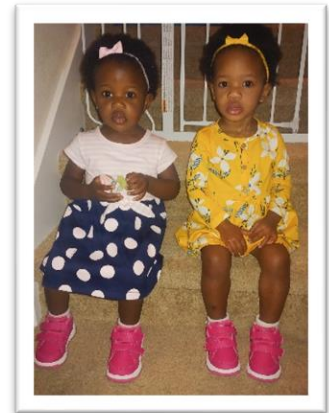
In the present day, the Office connects behavioral health advisory committees, coordinates mental health services for veterans, develops forensic and jail diversion policy, coordinates the state’s response to the opioid epidemic, implements suicide prevention policy and services initiatives, coordinates Mental Health First Aid, leads the agency’s trauma-informed care initiatives, and implements children, youth, and adult collaboratives.

Through her work as a JCMH Commissioner, and previously as a Collaborative Council member, Dr. Harvey says she has gained an understanding of the judicial branch of government.

“I used to hear people say, any changes that are needed in behavioral health, there has to be a three-branch government approach,” Dr. Harvey said. At the time, she was new to state government. “Now I understand...everybody's got a role in this.”

Dr. Harvey did fulfill her goal of working in academia; she was an adjunct professor at South University until she became HHSC’s Forensic Director. She taught clinical mental health counseling, psychopharmacology, practicum, and ethics, among others. While she isn’t currently teaching, she would like to get back into the classroom soon.

Outside of her work, Dr. Harvey recently took on a new title: mom. She lives with her husband and almost two-year-old twins in Austin. In her rare free time, Dr. Harvey likes to go to the movies, saying each January she lays out a list of the movies she wants to see.



*Dr. Harvey’s twins Madison Grace and McKenzie Joy*