

When [Williamson County Juvenile Services](#) Assistant Chief Matt Smith began college at the University of Texas at Austin, he had a family friend who was a senior there to help guide him.

“I always joke with him that he is the reason I graduated,” Smith said. “He helped me learn how to register for classes and all those things I didn't know how to do as a freshman.”

That friend is Justice Jeff Brown, a federal District Judge for the Southern District of Texas and former Associate Justice of the Texas Supreme Court. Justice Brown and Smith grew up in Dallas, and Justice Brown’s brother, Keith, is Smith’s best friend.



In 2018, Smith and Justice Brown both attended the [historic joint hearing](#) of the Supreme Court of Texas and the Court of Criminal Appeals which precipitated the creation of the JCMH, with Justice Brown eventually serving as the first co-Chair from the Supreme Court of Texas and Smith as a Collaborative Councilmember.

Smith spoke about his experience working in Williamson County Juvenile Services at the hearing, where several state-level judges and representatives took an interest in the county’s annual Mental Health in Schools Conference.

Williamson County Juvenile Services is an early adopter of using trauma-informed care, as well as the first agency to partner with the [Karyn Purvis Institute](#) to do Trust-Based Relational Intervention, or TBRI, in a juvenile probation setting.

Smith has been with Williamson County Juvenile Services for 20 years in many different capacities. He started as a juvenile probation officer and has also worked as a licensed counselor and therapist, administrator at the residential treatment program, and field unit supervisor.

Most recently, he was both the Director of Mental Health Services and the Assistant Chief of Juvenile Services, and now solely serves as the Assistant Chief.

Smith’s first job after graduating from college was working with patients discharging from mental health hospitals at an adult vocational rehabilitation center in Dallas.

He returned to graduate school at St. Edward’s University to become a Licensed Professional Counselor. He eventually began working as an associate psychologist at a state facility that was part of the Texas Youth Commission, now known as the Texas Juvenile Justice Department. Smith knew he wanted to work with kids but did not initially envision working in the juvenile justice system.

“Immediately I was drawn to it,” Smith said. “As I started interviewing these kids for their psychological [evaluations], they would go back into their past and talk about how they got to where they were. I just



*Williamson County Juvenile Services staff celebrating the department's designation as a TBRI Ambassador organization.*

had a real heart for that, and I recognized at that time, as a mental health professional, there was a ton of work to be done in the juvenile justice system.”

That job prepared him to work in juvenile services in Williamson County. Smith chairs the [Williamson County Youth Behavioral Task Force](#) and is involved in both [Resilient Wilco](#) and [STEP UP Texas](#)—two community collaborations focused on trauma-informed care and support of local youth.

“I just have a lot of respect for the kids and families in our system that are trying their best and really struggling,” Smith said. “So just finding even small ways to improve their lives is something that makes me tick.”

Smith has been able to share that passion and knowledge with others in the field as a Collaborative Councilmember at the JCMH. He has contributed to the [Texas Juvenile Mental Health and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Law Bench Book](#), now in its second edition, and has learned from his colleagues as well.

“I’ve been really, absolutely amazed at how much work is being done, and has been done in the last five years,” Smith said. “I’ve been able to connect with some really great professionals and people I would not have [otherwise met] and get interested in topics that I think would be foreign to me.”



*Smith training staff along with Oklahoma County Juvenile Services in Trauma-Informed Care in Juvenile Justice.*



*Smith and family outside the Erwin Center before a UT basketball game.*

Outside of his work with children in Williamson County, he has four children of his own. Smith and his wife have an 11-year-old boy, a 9-year-old girl, and two twin 7-year-old girls.

They keep busy with sports and activities. Two kids play soccer, and two play basketball.

“We’re either at an event or watching an event; that’s most of our lives,” Smith said.

Smith is a big sports fan himself and cheers on his alma mater, the Texas Longhorns. He and his wife also love to travel. He visited his wife when she studied abroad in South

America. He has also visited Europe and Costa Rica, and would love to travel more once the kids get a little older.