



**Testimony of Alan B. Loux
President and Chief Executive Officer
Rawhide Youth Services, New London, WI
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services
Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
“A Holistic Approach to the Care of At-Risk Youth”**

May 17, 2022

My name is Alan Loux, President and CEO of Rawhide Youth Services, which was founded, in 1965, by John and Jan Gillespie together with football legend Bart Starr and his wife, Cherry. Thank you to Chair Bonamici, Ranking Member Fulcher, and the Members of the Education & Labor Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services, for allowing me to explain Rawhide’s role in juvenile justice and to advocate for a holistic approach to the care of at-risk youth.

Rawhide is a private, not for profit, faith-based behavioral and mental health agency that provides community based and residential services for moderately and severely at-risk youth, aged 13 – 24.

It is best known for its qualified residential treatment program, conducted at its New London, Wisconsin campus, which includes 30 buildings on 600 wooded acres on the banks of the Wolf River. The residential program serves up to 50 youth at a time and features a fully-accredited high school and a wide-range of therapeutic services to address the behavioral, emotional, social, educational and spiritual needs of adolescent males who are referred to it via the Wisconsin juvenile court system.

Although Rawhide began as a residential care facility, it now provides school based counseling in twenty area schools and operates eight outpatient mental-health clinics, serving primarily adolescent youth and their parents. Rawhide operates five equine facilities, making it Wisconsin’s largest provider of equine assisted therapy, which has emerged as a promising, evidence-based treatment for youth with suicidal ideation and other depressive disorders. Recently, it entered a partnership with Brown County, Wisconsin, to provide a range of mental health and related services aimed at keeping youth from entering the juvenile justice system.

Rawhide provides vocational education and work experiences to help at-risk youth succeed in getting and keeping a job. It has also forged alliances with the New London, Wisconsin School District and Goodwill Industries, to provide life skills and

vocational education for both area and on-campus youth, to help them develop skills and experience necessary for gainful long-term employment.

While Rawhide furnishes professional therapeutic, educational and pro-social services, it also provides opportunities for spiritual wellness. As a faith-based agency, Rawhide seeks to address spiritual needs by serving everyone seeking care regardless of belief, meeting them where they are on their faith continuum. Its residential programs and practices are designed to instill key core values – unconditional love, faith, hope and perseverance. Its approach is not through proselytizing, but by exposing youth – frequently for the first time -- to religious ideals in various settings. These include prayer before meals, facilitating youth attendance at local churches of their choosing, and providing a full-time counselor affiliated with the highly renowned Christian-based Young Life program.

I'm pleased to report that Rawhide's holistic approach, coupled with active involvement of dedicated case workers and parents, bears fruit. According to the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, in 2020 (the latest year for which data are available), Rawhide had among the best outcome scores, with 82% of discharged youth being successfully reunited with their families, and 88% remaining out of the juvenile judicial system for at least six months following discharge. Achieving such results requires working collaboratively within a complex ecosystem of caregivers who are dedicated to the best interests of the youth that we serve. Working together is working!

Rawhide obtains funding from governmental agencies, insurance reimbursements and private benefactors. It also relies on significant charitable contributions, including the donation of more than 5,000 vehicles annually – many are sold to wholesale and retail customers while others are utilized in the auto maintenance component of Rawhide's vocational education program. These public/private partnerships are a model of collaboration that support Rawhide's initiatives to enhance the development of our youth.

Rawhide believes that its holistic approach is well suited to address behavioral and education-related issues affecting those in the juvenile justice system. Aberrant behaviors and school problems are most often the result of trauma that the youth have experienced or mental illness or related disabilities that they may have. Rawhide's approach to these challenges incorporates trauma-informed principles, based upon the understanding that meaningful change is dependent upon first addressing the root causes of misbehavior. Therapy, education and family engagement are essential components of this process.

Informed systems for youth justice and welfare emphasize prevention and diversion. In most cases, diversion will better prepare youth to thrive, which is the premise of Rawhide's program with Brown County. However, for those limited, serious cases where prevention and diversion services may prove ineffective, short-term residential treatment remains a viable and effective solution, especially if it includes a holistic approach such as practiced by Rawhide.

In sum, whether it be prevention or diversion programs, school or community-focused therapy, or out-of-home short-term residential treatment, an effective system requires, to the extent feasible, a seamless continuum of care and a broad range of caregivers – including family and public and private agencies – working together for the betterment of our youth.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to the improvement of juvenile justice. I will look forward to your questions.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alan B. Loux". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Alan B. Loux
President and Chief Executive Officer