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ALESANDRA GONZALES/LEADER-NEWS

**Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas-Uvalde branch director Brenda Faulkner (far left) and outreach coordinator Michelle Ramirez (far right) with Eagles' Haven Wellness Center assistant director Melissa Michelin and director Rebecca Jarquin. Michelin and Jarquin were visiting Uvalde from Florida, where their center, created after the 2018 mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, is based.**

## Staff from Eagles' Haven visit Uvalde

ALESANDRA GONZALES  
STAFF WRITER

Though separated by 1,428 miles, Parkland and Uvalde are united by grief after teenage gunmen infiltrated schools and ended innocent lives, making them the nation's deadliest high school shooting and second deadliest elementary school shooting, respectively.

On Wednesday, Aug. 9, Rebecca Jarquin and Melissa Michelin of Eagles' Haven Wellness Center, located on the border of Coral Springs and Parkland, visited Uvalde's bereavement center to share ideas with center director Brenda Faulkner as part of their two-day stay in town.

Faulkner took them on a tour of the murals and memorials while sharing the story of what happened in Uvalde on May 24, 2022, at Robb Elementary School.

Similar to the Uvalde branch of the Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas, Eagles' Haven Wellness Center began its services almost immediately following the 2018 Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting. The center opened a permanent location in March of 2019.

Eagles' Haven was originally scheduled to open in May of 2019, but the opening was fast tracked after two students who attended Marjory Stoneman Douglas at the time took their own lives within a year of

the tragedy.

As a result, the center primarily operated around crisis management in its early months and would help refer community members to outsourced, professional help.

Eventually, Eagles' Haven was able to establish its wellness activities and case management in house and expanded its services as originally intended.

Jarquin, who worked with the Jewish Adoption and Family Care Options organization that helped fund Eagles' Haven, led the structuring along with the help of her assistant director, Michelin.

"We are five years out from our tragedy. We came to Uvalde because they just had their first year and commemoration, and we felt that it was important for us to connect with communities who are going through the same thing," Jarquin said.

Jarquin and Michelin agreed that the goal of their visit to Uvalde is to be able to share resources and ideas on how to continue moving forward between the communities.

"I think that in this horrific event that is happening over and over again in our country, as communities that have experienced mass violence we have to be able to unite and share knowledge and information," Jarquin said. "It's critical."

Eagles' Haven currently

## VISIT: Wellness programs benefit Parkland

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offers wellness services led by volunteers, such as meditation, yoga, sound baths, dance, and creative arts and crafts that focus on bringing healing and wellness to both mind and body.

They also provide crisis support for those in need and case management services that allows the community to be helped either in house or be aided in finding outside services.

Much like Uvalde's bereavement center, Eagles' Haven offers their services to students, parents, and teachers free of charge. However, Eagles' Haven expansively serves without an age barrier. Their only requirement is that people seeking their services have been impacted by the Parkland shooting.

In keeping with its promise to support the Parkland community throughout their healing, Eagles' Haven was crucial in securing three wellness rooms for families of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School victims during a trial for the then-19-year-old shooter, Nikolas Cruz.

These rooms were closed to media and outsiders so that the families would be able to process the trauma resurfaced by the trial in private. In addition, they

were stocked with around-the-clock clinical therapists, food and drinks, pillows and blankets, and occasional therapy dogs.

"What I can say that has been very impactful for our community is our wellness programming because it is a mind body modality and sometimes it takes that format to bring people in the door," Jarquin said. "It's basically therapy in disguise."

Though the circumstances for their visit are sad, Jarquin and Michelin have enjoyed their visit to Uvalde.

"You Texans are so warm. You have been inviting. You have been gracious, [and] you have brought us into a situation where you're a smaller community and I'm sure in the first year you had a lot of outsiders descend upon the Uvalde community and you're not sure what people's intentions are.

"We did build a relationship with the Children' Bereavement Center before coming and they've been so open and welcoming and gracious to have us as guests," Jarquin said.

Together they will return to Eagles' Haven with things they learned from observing the bereavement center structure and the town in hopes of implement-

ing some things that they think may work in their community, as well.

"I really think that [Uvalde's] connectivity within your culture and faith has been very impactful, and I'd like to bring that back [to Parkland.] There has got to be a way that we can also look at how [Uvalde's] integrating that between the murals and memorials and what you're doing to bring the community together so that everybody collectively can grieve as a group. I think [Parkland] can use more of that," Jarquin said.

As far as long term work, they hope to take

their knowledge to other communities that have been impacted by mass shootings and will go to whatever communities that will be accepting of their visit.

"This will probably not be the last mass shooting unfortunately, and every community is going to need support of those who have been through it and have an understanding," Jarquin said.

Seventeen people died on Feb. 14, 2018, as a result of the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, and 21 died on May 24, 2022, as a result of the shooting at Robb Elementary School.

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