



# SCHOOL VIOLENCE: *React or pro-act?*

Submitted by Trisha Logan, Communications Specialist, Futures Unlimited, Inc.

Christa Jones, director of program services at Futures Unlimited in Wellington, Kansas, sighs and looks up from her computer with furrowed brows after reading another news report of a school shooting in a bordering state. She couldn't help walking mentally through such an event, imagining it occurring on our grounds. Would our existing safeguards prevent such an event? Are our staff equipped to keep everyone safe?

While many efforts had been made over the years at Futures to come up with response plans and safety protocols—Jones knew proactive safety measures were needed to match the changing world, and soon.

Futures Unlimited is on 13 acres along Highway 81 in Wellington, Ks. Seven buildings on campus house four preschool

classrooms, a day habilitation program, spaces for parent activities and therapeutic activities, staff offices and meeting rooms, storage and parking areas, and abundant playground and outdoor gathering places. It's a place buzzing with activity.

“Based on the disturbing increase of violence taking place directed at schools in both urban and rural communities and our commitment to doing all we can do to keep both the children we serve and our agency staff free from harm, we decided to apply for a one-time Head Start grant to help us with critical security improvements,” said Jones. “Our previous run-hide-fight training was no longer feasible with four classrooms of 17 preschoolers, bordered against a busy highway and industrial streets,” Jones explained.

Under Jones’s direction, the agency applied for the grant in July of 2022, and the following September, Futures was awarded the \$258,000 grant.

The first order of business was to comprehensively evaluate the agency’s safety needs, obtain professional recommendations, and implement the safety measures before the end of the fiscal term, June 30, 2023. After interviewing appropriately qualified risk management consulting firms, Futures selected Security Risk Management Consultants (SRMC) out of Ohio and scheduled them to visit in November.

Upon SRMC’s arrival, Lynda L. Buel, CPP, CFE, CSC, CPTED Practitioner, and Frank A. Demes, MFA, conducted a thorough multi-day assessment. The assessment included interviewing staff groups, comprehensive tours of the campus and buildings, consulting with local first responders and agency contractors, and collecting extensive data. The first draft containing their recommendations was sent in December, and after gathering feedback from Futures’ leadership team, the final report was completed in January, identifying the agency’s security strengths, specific vulnerabilities, recommended technology enhancements, and needed security prevention training, policies, procedures, programming, and planning.

Utilizing this extensive report, the agency’s management team developed prioritized action plans, assigning staff to implement and make all necessary arrangements with local contractors to install and coordinate the work relatively quickly.

Utilizing both security funding and ARP funds, specifics of the comprehensive plan included:

- Electronic access controls for all buildings and outside gates
- Upgraded campus-wide exterior lighting
- Campus-wide exterior cameras and support technology
- Upgraded and expanded commercial fencing to fully encompass the existing preschool play area and classroom, featuring access-controlled gates
- Installation of secured emergency access points for use by first responders
- The purchase of security-rated exterior doors leading into classrooms
- Commercial-grade air filtration systems were installed in preschool classrooms to reduce the pathogens and allergens circulating in classrooms to decrease absenteeism due to illness
- Commercial grade poured-in-place playground surfaces were installed to replace the wood mulch in fall zones for a safer, longer-lasting, and more hygienic play area.
- A more robust staff training protocol, including topics such as CRASE (Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events), emergency response plan enhancement, and creating a formal reunification process in conjunction with the community’s first responders.

“Completing most of these action steps before the end of our fiscal year was a monumental effort and was spearheaded by our Director of Business Operations, Maria Cornejo,” says Jones.

While no security plan can ensure all threats will be thwarted—it puts more tools into our toolbelt to protect the children and staff—and everyone else who comes each day. And parents appreciate knowing such significant security measures have been taken on behalf of their children.

Futures wholeheartedly recommends that agencies looking to proactively enhance their agency-wide security consider hiring a risk assessment consulting company first. “SRMC gave us a roadmap. They know the business and gave us solid recommendations every step of the way so we could make informed decisions for our customized needs,” says Jones. “As we’ve moved forward, they’ve stayed involved with us and answered questions to ensure we were selecting technology best suited for us, helping us to be good stewards of the grant money.”



[futures-unlimited.org](https://futures-unlimited.org)

Futures Unlimited, Inc. is Sumner County’s premier early childhood program offering preschool, Early Head Start, Head Start, special education, and pre-k services for children ages prenatal to 5. Research-based curriculum ties all program activities to cognitive outcomes. Full-day and half-day preschool options are available. School readiness checkpoints ensure children are progressing toward their next educational step. Programs involve and benefit the whole family. Futures helps families thrive! Futures Unlimited, Inc. is also the trusted provider of transportation (WALT) and disability supports in Wellington and Sumner County, Kansas, giving people of every age the help they need with the dignity they deserve.

