

# CECIL COUNTY



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## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITY REVIEW TEAM

### ANNUAL REPORT

2008

#### **PART I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- **INTRODUCTION**

A representative from the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence contacted the Cecil County Domestic Violence Program and requested they start a Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team in Cecil County. MNADV was told that it seemed as though there was enough support to have a team in Cecil County. David Trolio and Gary Pierce identified agencies and organizations who come in contact with victims and/or perpetrators of domestic violence and who would be approached to serve on the Cecil County DVFRT.

On May 27, 2008, the Cecil County DVFRT met, under the guidance of the team consultant from the MNADV, to begin the process of reviewing and revising a draft protocol supplied by the MNADV, based on previous experiences with other team formations.

- **PURPOSE AND GOALS OF THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITY REVIEW TEAM**

The purpose of the Cecil County DVFRT is to review deaths in which domestic violence has played a role, with the ultimate intent to prevent future fatal and serious physical injury occurrences. The review process is aimed at creating a climate in which organizations and individuals in Cecil County will commit themselves to an enhanced response to domestic abuse as a societal evil and a crime, and to victims that they might pursue a better quality of life.

**Mission Statement**

The Cecil County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team (DVFRT) seeks to evaluate and better comprehend deaths or near death situations related to intimate partner violence. It is hoped that through identification of gaps in services and evaluating conditions that led to the tragic death, domestic violence and related homicides or near death situations can be prevented in the future. The review represents the pinnacle of collaboration among community-serving organizations.

- **PURPOSE OF THE ANNUAL REPORT**

Domestic violence is defined as a pattern of behavior used to establish power and control over another family member or intimate partner using fear and intimidation, often including the threat or use of violence. The purpose of the annual report is to give an overview of those domestic violence cases resulting in death or near-death and record the team's findings and recommendations.

**PART II. TEAM AND PROTOCOL DEVELOPMENT**

- **TEAM MEMBERSHIP STRUCTURE**

Each of the following agencies agrees to provide two people, one primary representative and one alternate (if possible), to attend meetings, review cases and assist in formulating recommendations.

- Cecil County Sheriff's Department
- Maryland State Police
- Elkton Police Department

- North East Police Department
- Rising Sun Police Department
- Port Deposit Police Department
- Cecil County Dept. of Social Services
- Cecil County Health Department
- Maryland Division of Parole and Probation
- Local Family Violence Coordinating Council
- Union Hospital
- Upper Bay Counseling
- Domestic Violence/Rape Crisis Center
- Survivor of Domestic Violence

- **PROTOCOL DEVELOPMENT**

The MVADV provided the Cecil County DVFRT with a start-up binder which included the information to get the team organized. The Cecil County team used the draft protocol as a starting point to formulate their own protocol. The final protocol was finalized and adopted in August of 2008.

- **CASE SCREENING COMMITTEE**

The protocol indicates that the Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and a third party will make up the case screening committee. The case screening committee will meet between scheduled meetings and will look over several homicide, suicide, and near death cases to determine which cases meet the criteria for domestic violence involvement and should be reviewed. In determining which cases to review, the protocol requires that the case screening committee meet at least four (4) weeks prior to the next scheduled DVFRT meeting. The Chairperson will then submit the victims and offenders names to the team members so that the representatives, who are responsible for reviewing the records of their agency, can identify any information related to domestic violence about the parties

## **PART IV. OVERVIEW OF THE 2008 REVIEW**

- **INTRODUCTION**

The Cecil County DVFRT held its first case review on October 8, 2008. It had been decided at the previous team meeting which case would be

reviewed. After the case was presented the Team made recommendations based on the information provided during the review.

- **2008 REVIEW**

Case #1      First Degree Assault. Male accused Female partner  
Female victim

- **PART V. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Team examined this case thoroughly. The team was interested in what involvement if any the victim had with program services and if any was sought. We were interested if the police had been called to the residence and if so how many times. Had the victim ever sought a protective order and if so was it granted. Had Social Services ever been involved with the victim or the victims family. Were there any children involved?

The following are the findings and recommendations of the Team:

**FINDING #1:**      **This case displayed alcohol abuse on the part of both parties, the victim and accused. Heavy consumption of alcohol had been done just prior to this incident. It was noted that during most contact through the years by the legal system with either the victim or the accused alcohol seemed to be a factor.**

**Recommendation:**      **Stress the need for alcohol abuse education for children and young adults.**

**FINDING #2**      **The victim never seemed to follow through on seeking services. The victim had been to the Shelter, however chose not to take advantage of any services offered.**

**Recommendation:**      **Make sure responding officers are properly utilizing the Lethality Assessment Screen. This could link victims to services earlier by phone instead of the victim being responsible to follow through at a later time, which certainly would expedite the process.**

**FINDING #3**      **The case that was reviewed showed that the victim had never sought a protective order.**

**Recommendation:** Again, making certain through training that the Lethality Assessment is being used properly. By linking victims to services this will result in a higher likelihood that victims will seek a protection order.

**Finding #4** If there was a dedicated Domestic Violence Unit within Cecil County perhaps said unit would have had more of a personal contact with the victim.

**Recommendation** Keep attempting each year for the Maryland State Police or the Cecil County Sheriff's Department to develop a dedicated unit to domestic violence

## **PART V. CONCLUSION**

It is the hope of the Cecil County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team that this report will in some way be helpful in making changes to the way that the community responds to family violence.

There are four key recommendations resulting from the case review:

- (1) Educate the community about agencies and programs that are available to increase the awareness and help victims of domestic violence.**
- (2) Educate the police community about the importance of Lethality Assessment. Make it easier for victims to be connected to services.**
- (3) To educate the police community on the importance of having a domestic violence unit within a police department in Cecil County**
- (4) Attempt each year for one of the two primary law enforcement agencies in the county to form a dedicated domestic violence unit.**

Respectfully submitted,

R. Gary Pierce  
Chairperson  
Cecil County Domestic Violence  
Fatality Review Team