

The 2002 Annual Report of the

KNOX COUNTY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITY REVIEW COMMITTEE

Presented by

Randall E. Nichols, District Attorney General, Committee Chairperson

BACKGROUND

On August 29th 2000, an agreement was entered into between The Community Coalition on Family Violence, Knox County District Attorney's Office, Knox County Circuit Court, Knox County Criminal Court, Knoxville Police Department, Knox County Medical Examiner's Office, Knox County Health Department, Tennessee Department of Children Services, Tennessee Department of Human Services, Tennessee Board of Probation and Parole, Child & Family Tennessee, University of Tennessee Medical Center, St. Mary's Health System, Baptist Health System, Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center, East Tennessee Children's Hospital, TWCA, Knox Area Rescue Ministries, Salvation Army, Rural/Metro EMS, Knoxville's Community Development Corporation, University of Tennessee College of Social Work, Police Advisory And Review Committee and Knoxville Legal Aid Society. (The Knox County Sheriff's Department was invited to participate, however, to date the Sheriff's department has not signed the cooperative agreement.) These participants, acknowledging their role in promoting and protecting the well being of children, families, and the public health, sought to review domestic related fatalities in order to make future recommendations for intervention and prevention. This cooperative agreement was made possible through legislation effective on May 22, 2000. Tenn. Code Ann. 36-3-624.

GOALS

The agreed objectives of the Knox County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee, hereinafter KCDVFRC, were as follows:

- 1) To describe trends and patterns of domestic violence deaths in Tennessee.
- 2) To identify and investigate the prevalence of a number of risks and potential risk factors in the population of domestic violence descendents.
- 3) To evaluate the service and system responses to families who are considered at risk, and to offer recommendations for improvement in those responses.
- 4) To characterize high-risk groups in terms that are compatible with the development of public policy.
- 5) To improve the sources of data collection by developing protocols for autopsies, death investigations, and complete recording of cause of death on the death certificates.

GUIDELINES

The KCDVFRC established its own operating guidelines. Before each scheduled meeting face sheets containing pertinent information about the cases to be reviewed were forwarded to each participant. Using the information from this sheet, participants gathered any records they might have in their possession to bring to the scheduled meeting. Of utmost concern to the KCDVFRC was confidentiality. Each participant

signed a sheet setting forth the confidentiality agreement before every case reviewed. These sheets were witnessed and collected at every meeting. All face sheets were also collected and destroyed at the end of every meeting.

At each meeting, the KCDVFCRC sought answers to the following questions:

1. Do all criminal justice system and social service agencies in the City of Knoxville have specific policies and procedures related to domestic violence?
 - a. Which agencies had contact with the victim and perpetrator in the identified case?
 - b. What services were provided to each?
 - c. Were all current policies and procedures followed in the handling of criminal/civil matters involving this case?
 - d. Did any criminal justice and/or civil system agency have contact with the victim and/or perpetrator related to an Order of Protection or Restraining Order?
 - e. Are the current protocols adequate for the handling of domestic violence cases?
 - f. If not, what recommendations could be made to improve the response of the system agencies?
2. What other local, state, or federal agencies had direct contact with the victim and/or perpetrator related to prior domestic violence?
3. What was the involvement of the Knox County Criminal and Civil Court Judges in the cases up for review?
4. Is there sufficient information sharing among all agencies involved in domestic violence cases?
 - a. What information was available to each agency involved with the parties in the case?
 - b. How accessible is available information to interested agencies?

The purpose of this review was not to assign blame or to challenge difficult decisions made by any participant. The review was intended to refine, improve and coordinate a response toward intervention and prevention in domestic violence cases.

THE FIRST YEAR

Meetings were held quarterly on the first Wednesday of the month. Cases still pending resolution in the Criminal Justice System were not reviewed. The dates of the reviewed fatalities ranged from May 1998 to June 2000. Ten cases were reviewed, and from these ten cases, eleven suspects and twelve victims were identified. Three of the Ten cases were identified as murder-suicides. In nine of the ten cases the victims and suspects were of the same race. In the only interracial case the victim was Caucasian and the Suspects were African American.

Victim Profiles

Caucasian	5	42%
African American	7	58%

Male	4	33%
Female	8	67%
Minors under 10	2	17%
Adults 18-20	1	8%
21-30	2	17%
31-40	2	17%
41-50	4	33%
51-60	0	0%
61+	1	8%

Suspect Profiles

Caucasian	4	36%
African American	7	64%
Male	9	82%
Female	2	18%
Minors 10-17	1	9%
Adults 18-20	1	9%
21-30	4	36%
31-40	3	27%
41-50	0	0%
51-60	1	9%
61+	1	9%

Geographical Location of Fatality – Knoxville City Limits

East District	6	60%
Central District	3	30%
West District	1	10%

RECOMMENDATIONS

Several cases reviewed were directly linked to child custody disputes. As such, several participants got together to create a sheet listing risk factors and resources. This sheet could then be provided to all parties involved in any child custody dispute. Judge Swann agreed to provide the sheet through his court, with arrangements being made so that the sheet would also be available in Juvenile and Chancery Courts.

A severe lack of mental health and alcohol and drug resources were also identified. Obviously, more funding is needed in this area.

The necessity for promptly and accurately entering information in the National Crime Information Center database, hereinafter, NCIC, was also identified. All Knox County NCIC operators receive training in order to effectuate that goal. Furthermore, the Knox County District Attorney's Office has a system in place that allows for the prompt approval of entries for outstanding arresting instruments and extradition requests. Further, it is imperative that the Tennessee Department of Probation and Parole conduct a pre-sentence or post-sentence investigation for all felony pleas in Criminal Court.

Please review the attached directory. Several listings are incomplete. Please e-mail complete addresses, phone and fax numbers, e-mail address changes and any corrections to debbie.herron@knoxcounty.org . Also, if you find someone has been left out. Please e-mail that information as well. Thanks for your cooperation.

PARTICIPANT DIRECTORY

-A-

-B-

Beth Ballo
YWCA
blballo@aol.com

Kim Barner
U.T. Medical Center
KMASSEY@MC.UTMCK.edu

Hon. Richard R. Baumgartner
Criminal Court Judge
400 Main Avenue
Knoxville, TN 37902
865 215-2508
865 215-4921 fax

Ola Blackman-McBride
Salvation Army
P.O. Box 669
Knoxville, TN 37901
Olablackmc@aol.com

Jon D. Bogott
St. Mary's Health System
jbogott@stmaryshealth.com

-C-

Hon. Chuck Cerny
General Sessions Court Judge
400 Main Avenue

Knoxville, TN 37902
865 215-2370
865 215-2403 fax

-D-

Joan Davis, Team Coordinator
Tennessee Department of Children's Services
531 Henley St., 4th Floor
Knoxville, TN 37902
865/594-6633 ext. 1126
Joan.Davis.@state.tn.us

Mary Drexler
KCDC
P.O. Box 3550
Knoxville, TN 37927-3550
865 594-8820
865 594-0246 fax
mdrexler@ml.kcdc.org

-E-

Sandra K. Elkins, M.D.
Knox County Medical Examiner
1924 Alcoa Highway U71
Knoxville, TN 37920
865 544-9560

-F-

Monroe Free
Knox Area Rescue Ministries
P.O. Box 3352
Knoxville, TN 37929
Blively@karm.org

-G-

Hon. Carey E. Garrett
Juvenile Court Judge
3323 Division Street
Knoxville, TN 37919
865 215-6400
865 215-6520 fax

-H-

Stephanie Hall, M.D.
Knox County Health Department
140 Dameron Ave.
Knoxville, TN 37917
215-5093
Sphall@esper.com

Carolyn Hacker
Sexual Assault Crisis Center
P.O. Box 11523
Knoxville, TN 37939
558-9040

Kathy Hatfield
Child & Family Tennessee
901 E. Summit Hill
Knoxville, TN 37915
865/521-5605 ext. 270
865/524-4790 fax
khatfield@child-family.org

Angela Hill
Knoxville Police Department
P.O. Box 3610
Knoxville, TN 37927
Phone: (865) 215-7208
Fax: (865) 215-7133
email: ahill@cityofknoxville.org

-I-
-J-

Hon. Ray L. Jenkins
Criminal Court Judge
400 Main Avenue
Knoxville, TN 37902
865 215-2509
865 215-3921 fax

-K-

Chief Phil E. Keith
Knoxville Police Department
P.O. Box 3610
Knoxville, TN 37927
Phone: (865) 215-7229
Fax: (865) 215-7412
email: pkeith@cityofknoxville.org

-L-

Hon. Mary Beth Leibowitz
Criminal Court Judge
400 Main Avenue
Knoxville, TN 37902
865 215-2366
865 215-3163 fax

-M-
-N-

Randall E. Nichols
Knox County Attorney General
400 W. Main Avenue, Suite 168
Knoxville, TN 37902
865 215-2515
865 215 4253 fax
Contact Person: Ashley Julian
ashley.julian@knoxcounty.org

-O-
-P-

Martha Phillips
Court Clerk
400 Main Avenue
Knoxville, TN 37902
865 215-2404
865 215-2927 fax

-Q-
-R-

Dennis W. Rowe
Rural Metro
DROWE4357@aol.com

-S-

Carol A. Scott
Executive Director, Police Advisory and Review Committee
400 Main Avenue
Knoxville, TN 37902
865 215-3869
865 215-2211
cscott@ci.knoxville.tn.us

Nancy E. Sentell
Tennessee Department of Human Services – Adult Protective Services
531 Henley Street, Suite 403
Knoxville, TN 37902
865 594-5689
865 594-5740 fax
Nancy.Sentell@state.tn.us

Karen M. Sowers
U.T. College of Social Work
kmsowers@utk.edu

Hon. Bill Swann
400 Main Avenue
Knoxville, TN 37902
865 215-2399
865 215-3257 fax
signet3@esper.com

-T-

Gary Tullock
Tennessee Department of Probation and Parole
1426 Elm St.
Knoxville, TN 37921
865/582-2056
865/594-7105 fax
865/388-0133 cell
Gary.Tullock@state.tn.us
Gtullock2@mail.state.tn.us

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Our next meeting will be Wednesday October 9, 2002 at 1:00 p.m. at the Moses Center. In the interim we needs nominations (volunteers) for a new chair or chairs. Please submit your nomination by September 1. As a suggestion, other jurisdictions have co-chairs. One involved in the criminal justice system and the other more involved with social services. Please talk with each other and seriously consider taking on this new role.