

**COCHISE COUNTY- SIERRA VISTA REGIONAL  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITY REVIEW TEAM  
2012 ANNUAL REPORT**



**SUBMITTED TO:  
TOM HORNE, ARIZONA ATTORNEY GENERAL  
JANUARY 9, 2013**

January 22, 2013

**To The Arizona Domestic Violence Community**

As Co-chairs of the Cochise County- Sierra Vista Regional Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team, it is our pleasure to share with you our team's annual report. Under authority of A.R.S. 41-198, our team was appointed on March 22, 2012 through adoption of Sierra Vista City Council Resolution 2012-024. This resolution is specifically worded to allow for a regional team in Cochise County and for a member of the Sierra Vista Police Department to serve as team chairperson. The benefit of this approach is that it allows our team to work in a cohesive capacity with all stakeholders in domestic violence within our county, regardless of municipal boundaries. This approach has greatly empowered our team and is consistent with our team's vision statement, "There are no boundaries to a coordinated community response."

This report includes the review of a domestic violence incident resulting in a fatality in Cochise County. While researching the history in neighboring jurisdictions and examining the timeline constructed, a number of agency involvements were identified. A close examination of the situation in its entirety was revealing, forming the impetus for the recommendations in this report. We are confident our recommendations in this report are feasible to implement and will help sharpen our ability to address domestic violence in our community. We hope at the statewide level our recommendations are beneficial to those tasked with addressing domestic violence.

We will continue to review domestic violence related fatalities in Cochise County during the coming years. It is our goal to work progressively towards an enhanced coordinated community response in all areas of domestic violence in Cochise County. Sharing our experiences and recommendations across the state is a priority for our team and we recognize its importance in the larger picture of improving the response to domestic violence in Arizona.

Sgt. Christopher L. Hiser

Sierra Vista Police Department

Detective Lori L. Burdick

Sierra Vista Police Department

**COCHISE COUNTY- SIERRA VISTA REGIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITY**  
**REVIEW TEAM MEMBERSHIP 2012**

Christopher L. Hiser (Co-chair)  
Detective Sergeant  
Sierra Vista Police Department

Rosamaria Mendoza  
Program Coordinator  
Chiricahua Community Health Center

Diana True  
School Resource Officer  
Sierra Vista Police Department

Kristine L. Hanson, LMSW  
Victim Advocate  
Cochise Victim Awareness (President)

Sarah Rutgers  
MSW Student  
University of Southern California

James L. Riley  
Superior Court Judge (Retired)

Ana Monica Rawlings  
Battered Immigrant Women- Client Advocate  
Catholic Community Services in Southeastern AZ

Daniella Reidmiller  
Lead Case Manager  
Forgach House Domestic Crisis Center  
Catholic Community Services in Southeastern AZ

Priscilla Whitlock-Coates  
Child and Family Resources

Susan Kolb  
Attorney  
Southern Arizona Legal Aid, Inc.

Lori L. Burdick (Co-chair)  
Detective  
Sierra Vista Police Department

Christina Riddle  
Domestic Violence Shelters Program Coordinator  
Catholic Community Services in Southeastern AZ

Justin Butler  
Detective  
Sierra Vista Police Department

Elizabeth York  
Vice President  
Cochise Victim Awareness

Amy Fairchild Haer  
Staff Attorney/Program Director  
Asylum Program of Arizona  
Catholic Community Services

Pilar Deziga Velazquez  
Protection Officer  
Consulate of Mexico (Douglas, AZ)

Silvia Sanchez de la Rosa  
Protection Officer  
Consulate of Mexico (Douglas, AZ)

Melanie Kennebeck  
School Counselor  
Sierra Vista Unified School District

Jim Gilchrist  
CHC

John Willis  
Attorney  
Southern Arizona Legal Aid, Inc.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*2012 marked the first year the Cochise County- Sierra Vista Regional Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team became operational. The mission of the Cochise County- Sierra Vista Regional Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team is to examine domestic violence related deaths and address systemic concerns surrounding these cases in an effort to enhance a coordinated community response to domestic violence in local communities. The team operates under authority of A.R.S. 41-198 and Sierra Vista City Council Resolution 2012-024. The team is currently comprised of 20 members from various entities in Cochise County and co-chaired by two members of the Sierra Vista Police Department. The team's goal is to review one domestic violence fatality case each year.*

*In 2012 the Cochise County- Sierra Vista Regional Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team conducted a review of a case that spanned two neighboring jurisdictions in Cochise County. All reports and materials used to conduct the review were obtained from the two agencies involved. A review of the case in its entirety revealed numerous law enforcement contacts with the parties. An examination revealed that over the course of three years, there were over 25 involvements with law enforcement, many of which were domestic violence related cases involving harassment, stalking, violating orders of protection, and physical altercations. The fatal incident in this case involved the male subject taking the female spouse hostage. The female was eventually released and the male committed suicide shortly thereafter.*

*Key findings in this case included the following:*

- **Very little communication and coordination was present between the various officers handling the multiple calls for service involving the parties;**
- **There were variations among patrol officers in how they handled calls where the allegation was a violation of an order of protection;**
- **The neighbor was a crucial witness to ongoing stalking but was unaware of the situation and did not know to report the observations to police.**

*Recommendations as a result of this review:*

- **Implement a lead officer for ongoing domestic violence situations to help facilitate communication, coordination, and oversight;**
- **Use of a lethality screen and safety plan packet at the first responding officer level at the scene;**
- **Provide 20-30 minute roll call training modules to patrol officers on a regular basis. Training modules will include the following topics: DV dynamics, officer safety tactics, interviewing children in DV situations, notifying CPS, stalking investigations, strangulation investigations, application of aggravating statutes, and use of the lethality screen/ safety plan packet.**

## **Process**

The Cochise County- Sierra Vista Regional Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team meets monthly. Most meetings span two hours. The team has yet to develop a formalized case selection criteria for determining cases to review. The case in this particular report was the first one for the team to review. The domestic violence fatality incident in this review was known to the team's co-chairs and presented to the remaining team members. No other candidate cases were brought to the table for consideration and the team unanimously chose to review this incident. The material used to conduct this review included all police reports from the two law enforcement agencies involved and the investigating detective's case file.

We plan to review one domestic violence related fatality each year. As we embark on 2013, we will continue to recruit other law enforcement agencies in Cochise County onto our team. We will also be approaching agencies in the county to provide candidate cases for review and invite the agency to participate in the review.

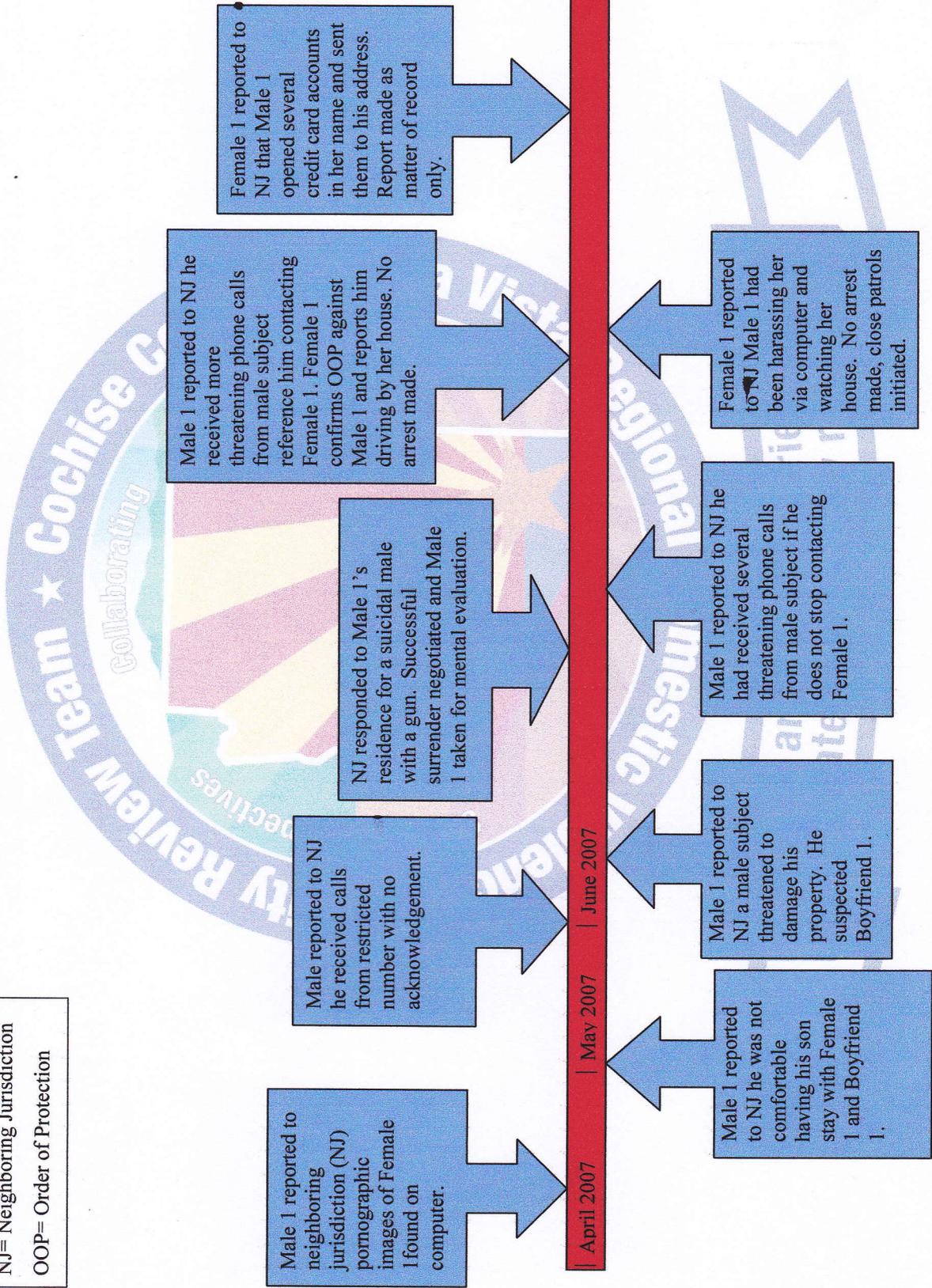
## **Case Overview**

The domestic violence related fatality reviewed in 2012 by the Cochise County- Sierra Vista Regional Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team consisted of a male subject taking his estranged wife hostage. The wife was eventually released by the husband. Other felony crimes were committed as well during the incident. The husband took his own life shortly after releasing his wife. There were numerous calls for service involving these parties that were of a domestic violence nature in the months preceding the fatal incident. These calls for service included reports of computer harassment, violating orders of protection, misdemeanor assault, criminal damage, and suicidal ideations. Safety planning practices were utilized prior to the final incident.

In constructing a timeline of events, a similar pattern of conduct was noted with the same male subject and his first wife in a neighboring jurisdiction. Over 25 contacts with law enforcement were noted for the two relationships combined. Examining the comprehensive timeline as well as the calls for service in the months leading up to the final incident indicated no coordination between the agencies involved and little communication between responding officers. The timeline constructed by the team follows.

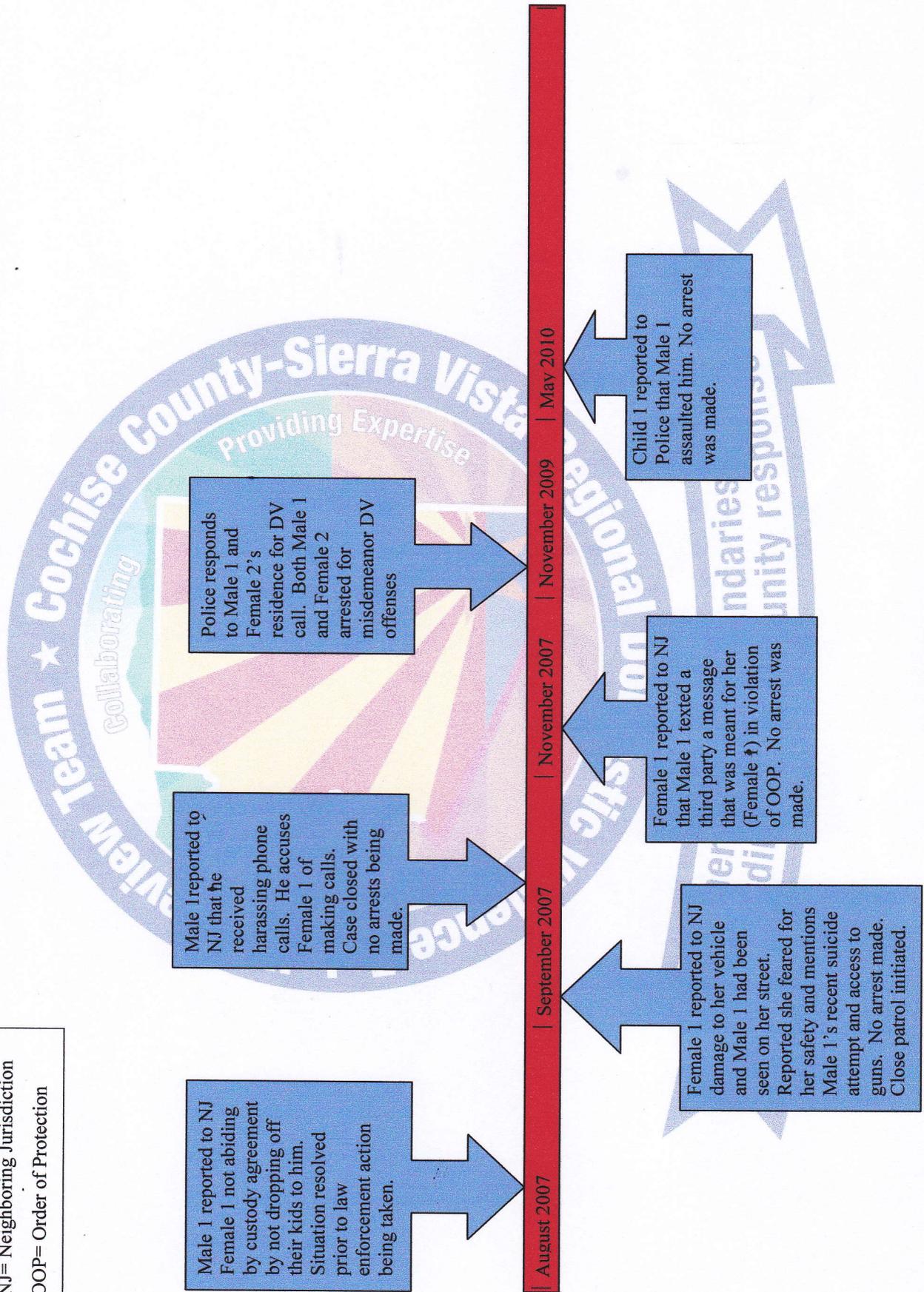
# Sequence of Events

NJ= Neighboring Jurisdiction  
 OOP= Order of Protection



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# Sequence of Events

OOP=Order of Protection

Male 1 reported to Police he needed a "keep the peace" while he retrieved belongings from Female 2's residence. Female 2 called and asked for close patrol of residence. Male 1 accuses Female 2 of slapping him prior to police arrival. No arrest made.

Male 1 reported to Police he located evidence in Female 2's residence about Boyfriend 2. Male 1 reports being assaulted by Female 2 during argument about Boyfriend 2. Case sent to CAO. No prosecution.

Violation of OOP reported to SVPD.

Female 2 reported to Police Male 1 wrote her a suicidal email. Male 1 contacted by Police and agreed to speak to crisis counselor. Hand gun removed from Male 1's residence.

Female 2 contacted Police to make complaint reference Male 1's accusations about her making threats to him via computer. She accused Male 1 of hacking her social networking site. She accused Male 1 of damaging her vehicle. Investigation opened.

December 2010

January 2011

Female 2 obtains order of protection (oop) against Male 1

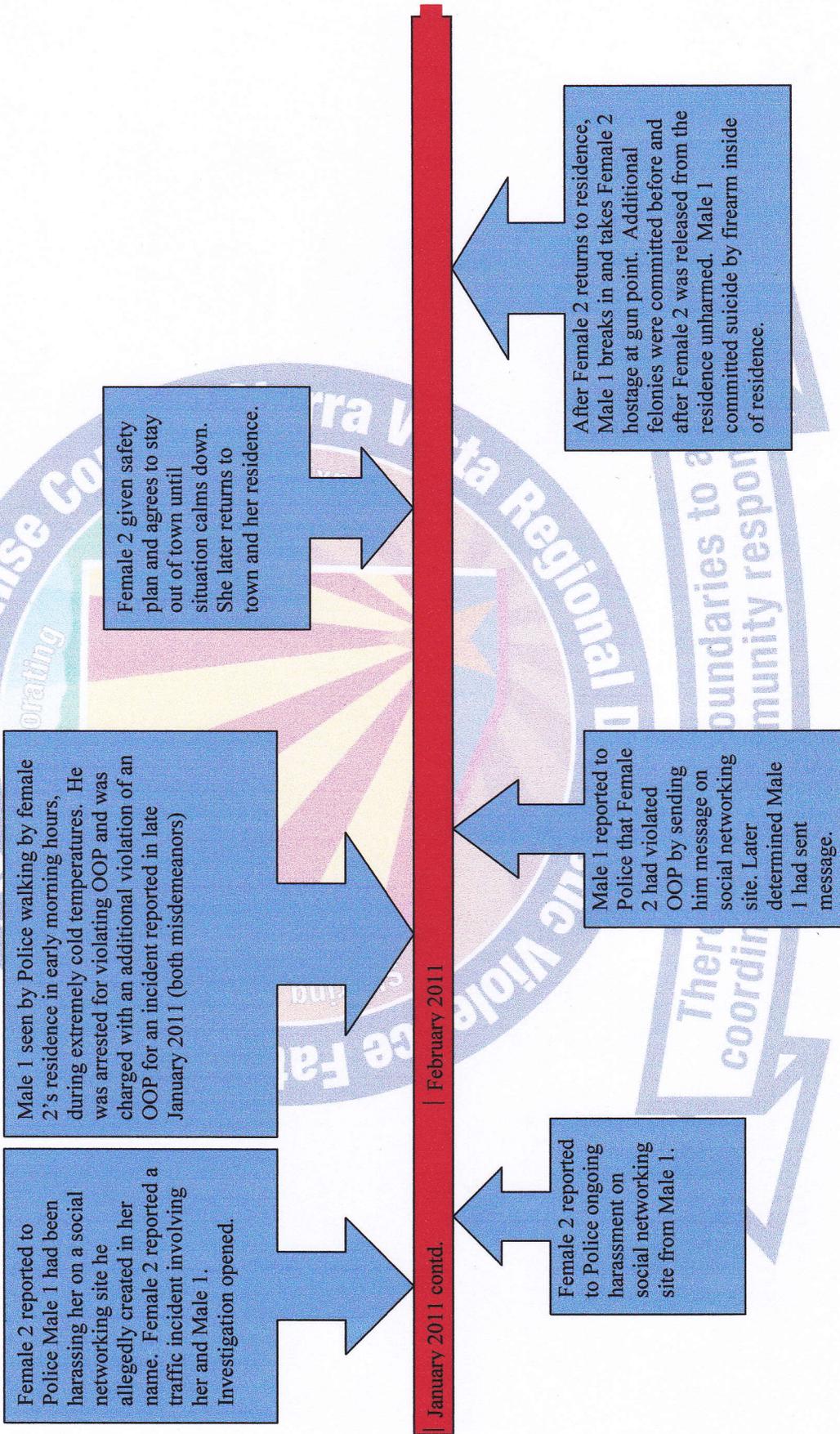
Female 2 reported to Police Male 1 allegedly broke into her residence and caused damage inside. Female 2 additionally reported Male 1 sent her harassing texts. Investigation opened.

Third Party reported to Police Male 1 stole property from Female 2's residence. No charges filed due to lack of evidence. Male 1 obtains OOP against Female 2.

Male 1 reported to Police he received threats from Female 2 via computer.

Female 2 served with OOP from Male 1.

# Sequence of Events





## Key Findings

- I. Due to the nature of law enforcement, victims of domestic violence will find themselves dealing with various police officers when reporting domestic violence related crimes. The use of multiple police officers in this review lead to a lack of communication and knowledge of events transpiring between the parties involved.
- II. There were numerous domestic violence calls in this review among different law enforcement agencies. There is currently no data system that allows for information sharing between the different agencies that allows for accurate and timely data on involved parties. A method of data sharing would have allowed police officers to verify potential patterns of behavior between the different parties.
- III. During the review there appeared to be lack of knowledge among some of the police officers in how to deal with investigations pertaining to violation of court orders. Additional findings shows that specialized training for officers in domestic violence may have assisted in dealing with the various calls for service.
- IV. Orders of protection were requested by both parties in this review. Copies of the order of protection from one of the persons involved, that had not been served to the defendant, where not available at the time of call. Court orders in multiple jurisdictions were not easily accessible to responding patrol officers.
- V. Lethality screening and safety planning were implemented approximately 6 months after calls for service were being received during the second relationship. Previous parties involved were not provided a safety plan or lethality screening.
- VI. The review identified that the neighbors were aware of Male 1 going by Female 2's home. Due to the lack of information sharing, the neighbors were not notified of the severity of the situation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**\*MUCH LIKE MANY OTHER SMALL/MID-SIZED POLICE AGENCIES IN AZ, THE SIERRA VISTA POLICE DEPARTMENT DOES NOT HAVE A SPECIALIZED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE UNIT TASKED WITH INVESTIGATING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. SVPD PATROL OFFICERS ARE REQUIRED TO CONDUCT ALL NECESSARY FOLLOW UP ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES. ONLY DURING INSTANCES INVOLVING SERIOUS FELONY CRIMES ARE DETECTIVES WITH THE SVPD INVOLVED IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES. ALTHOUGH THESE RECOMMENDATIONS MAY BE PALE IN COMPARISON TO STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES IN LARGE AGENCIES THAT HAVE FORMALIZED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE UNITS, WE FEEL THESE RECOMMENDATIONS (AND FOLLOWING IMPLEMENTATION) ARE EFFECTIVE FOR THE MANY AGENCIES IN AZ THAT ARE STRUCTURED SIMILAR TO THE SIERRA VISTA POLICE DEPARTMENT.**

- 1) Appoint a "lead officer" for on-going domestic violence incidents where there are multiple calls for service involving the same family or residence. The lead officer will not be responsible for responding to each call for service, but will have the following responsibilities:
  - a. Review all reports and arrests made, which are compiled in a comprehensive case file;
  - b. Ensure domestic violence resources are made available to victims;
  - c. Maintain a system of communication between any officers that may respond to the residence and the lead officer;
  - d. Serve as the main point of contact for the victim(s);
  - e. Ensure, if applicable, aggravating statutes and/or felony charges are applied given the situation in its entirety;
  - f. Maintain open communication with the Cochise County Attorney's Office on investigations.
  
- 2) Create a flagging system in Spillman (SVPD police reporting system) that alerts officers to check domestic violence history or to contact a lead officer if responding to a particular residence or running a check on a particular name.
  
- 3) Implement the use of lethality screens and safety plan packets at the first responding officer level at the scene.
  
- 4) Provide 20-30 minute roll call training modules to patrol officers on a regular basis. The training modules will include (but not limited to): Domestic Violence Dynamics, Domestic Violence Laws, Policy & Procedure, Stalking Investigations, Strangulation Investigations, Officer Safety Tactics on DV Calls, Interviewing Children in DV Calls, Notifying CPS, Handling Repetitive DV Calls/ Aggravated Domestic Violence, Implementing the Lethality Screen/ Safety Plan Packet.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

**DURING THE ONGOING REVIEW PROCESS IN 2012, THE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT BECAME EVIDENT EARLY ON. TO TEST FEASIBILITY, SOME OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS WERE IMPLEMENTED EXPERIMENTALLY, WITH THE SVPD AS A "PROVING GROUND" FOR NEW APPROACHES TOWARD HANDLING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WITH INCREASING LETHALITY IN COCHISE COUNTY. WE ARE PLEASED TO SHARE OUR SUCCESS STORIES ON IMPLEMENTATION, AS WELL AS OUR FUTURE GOALS FOR BETTER IMPLEMENTATION.**

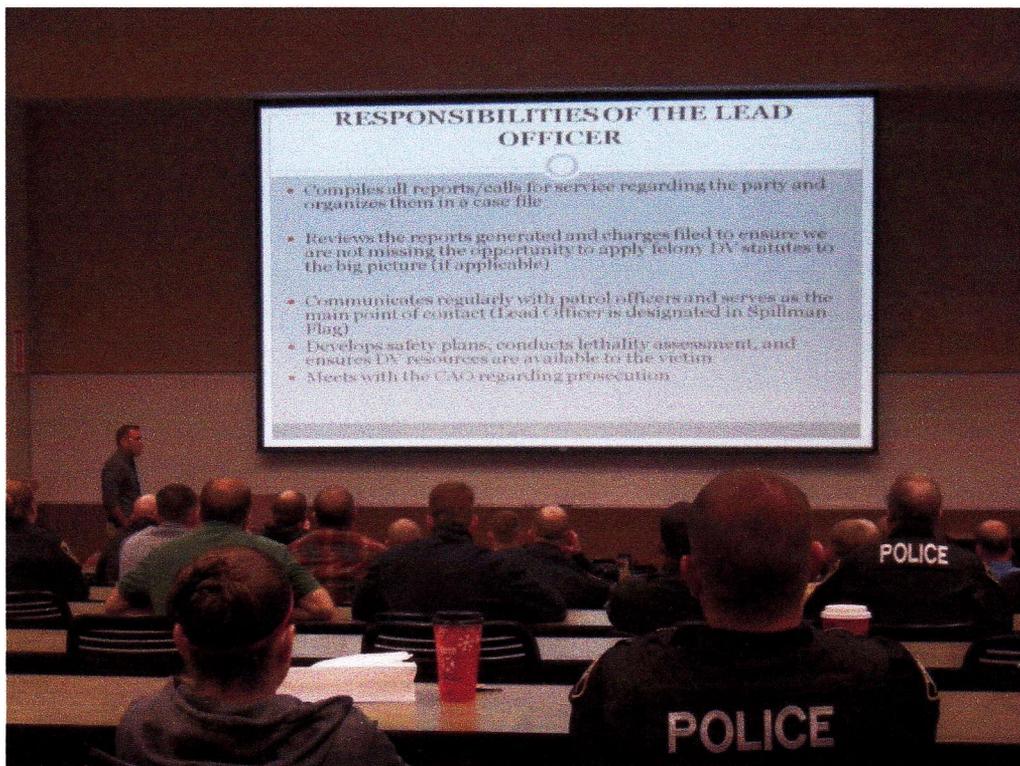
- 1) The concept of a "lead officer" has been implemented with success in 2012 within the Sierra Vista Police Department. The concept was implemented on at least three different occasions by SVPD Detective Lori Burdick during instances of repeat DV calls involving the same parties and increasing risk/lethality was recognized. In one instance, the lead officer had sufficient oversight of the ongoing case to intervene when a subsequent misdemeanor arrest was going to be made by a responding officer. The lead officer recognized that Aggravated Harassment and Stalking charges were more appropriate given the totality of the circumstances and felony charges were filed in lieu of a misdemeanor. In addition, safety planning and lethality screening were utilized with the victim to help the victim decide on a future course of action that would minimize her risk.

Communication, organization, and coordination are all key factors to success when implementing the lead officer concept. We have found this to be a successful approach toward handling repeat domestic violence calls and it prevents a piece-meal response based on each individual incident. The lead officer can't be responsible for necessarily investigating each DV incident as the officer may be tied up on another call or may not even be on duty when a call comes in. The lead officer is more like a quarterback that maintains oversight and calls the plays.

In 2013 we began working on recruiting selected patrol officers within the SVPD to receive the training and tools to become a lead officer. Some of the individual benefits of this peripheral assignment are that it offers an informal leadership position for those seeking future promotion to Corporal or Sergeant and it serves as a great training tool and skill set enhancement for those seeking future promotion to a detective position.

We will continue to work on sharpening our response and utilizing the lead officer concept in the coming years. In addition, we will work on a systematic way to detect

and flag repeat/ongoing DV situations in the community so that the lead officer concept can be applied in a timely manner.



Teaching the lead officer concept at SVPD in-service

- 2) The reporting system used by the Sierra Vista Police Department (Spillman) allows for “cautions” or “alerts” which are highly visible in a red tab format to be added to a particular name or residence. This system will be used to notify responding officers to contact the lead officer later and forward the incident report to the lead officer. This system will enhance communication and awareness among all patrol officers. Training will be given to all patrol sergeants in order to assist in identifying candidate names and addresses for flagging.
- 3) A lethality assessment packet was created and is being used by first responders to domestic violence in Sierra Vista. The packet contains the following:
  - Lethality assessment screen (Maryland Network Model);
  - Checklist to notify neighbors in stalking, harassment, and order of protection violation cases;
  - Safety plan questionnaire and checklist.

Training on the use of the lethality assessment packet is being delivered to SVPD patrol officers during roll call training sessions. Our goal is to bring the Cochise County Attorney's Office on board with recognizing the lethality screen. An additional goal is to reach out to neighboring law enforcement agencies in Cochise County and offer training on the lethality assessment packet.

- 4) Both co-chairs of this team are domestic violence instructors. Roll call training modules were developed to address the lessons learned in this particular review. The roll call training is delivered to patrol officers during overlap shifts. Each training module lasts 20-30 minutes in length. Some of the roll call training modules covered the following topics: domestic violence laws, policy and procedure, stalking investigations, strangulation investigations, interviewing children, handling repeat calls and aggravating statutes, officer safety, and implementing the lethality screen and safety plan packet. The benefit of brief training sessions is that they can be delivered more frequently in order to maximize the number of officers receiving the training. It is our goal to continue developing new training modules to address trends in domestic violence. It is also our goal to extend this training program to other law enforcement agencies in Cochise County.



Roll call training at SVPD



# Team Goals

**APPENDIX**



**ATTACHMENT A: CITY OF SIERRA VISTA RESOLUTION 2012-024**

**ATTACHMENT B: CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT**

**ATTACHMENT C: LETHALITY SCREEN/SAFETY PLAN PACKET**



Some of the team members at a recent review meeting