



## **Howard County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team Howard County, Maryland**

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### **2014 Recommendations**

The mission of the Howard County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team (HCDVFRT) is to attempt to reduce domestic violence, specifically domestic related fatalities and near fatalities in our County through a multi-disciplinary review of our response to domestic violence in our community. The goal is to utilize a multi-disciplinary model to address training and community based prevention programs, as well as to effect systemic change to our community's response to domestic violence.

The HCDVFRT has reviewed over the past year a domestic related homicide that occurred in our community with the purpose of identifying systemic issues that might be addressed and corrected. The HCDVFRT has identified two (2) issues and has agreed upon the following recommendations to address these issues.

#### **1. Improve Domestic Violence Outreach to Howard County Homeless Population**

##### **Identified Problem:**

There is a lack of accessible information to the homeless population in Howard County regarding domestic violence. The main resource in Howard County for homelessness services is Grassroots which does not have specified domestic violence training for its volunteers.

Domestic violence victims who are homeless have a greater difficulty getting domestic violence services often due to multi-layered issues,

including mental health and substance abuse, as well as a lack of stable living conditions.

**Recommendations:**

Increase the resources available for domestic violence victims at Grassroots Day Resource Center. HopeWorks will provide educational posters and pamphlets for display and dissemination at the Day Resource Center.

Provide training by HopeWorks and the Howard County Police Department Domestic Violence Unit to the Grassroots volunteers. The training will include information on screening for domestic violence, the cycle of violence, use of the lethality assessment by Howard County police and the location and availability of resources.

Assign a contact person at Grassroots in an effort to streamline communication.

Participate in the Howard County Government Citizen Service's "Homeless Count" in order to circulate information on Domestic Violence resources.

Increase the visibility of HopeWorks at the Day Resource Center by making an advocate available on an on-call basis if necessary.

**2. Create a System to Better Identify and Manage Mental Health and Substance Abuse issues in Domestic Violence Victims.**

**Identified Problem:**

There is no existing protocol on how Howard County agencies are to work together in order to provide services for domestic violence victims who are dual diagnosed and suffer from both mental health disorders and substance abuse. The level of services falls off almost completely when the victim is also homeless.

The agencies who deal with domestic violence, mental health and substance abuse are not always able to work together, due to a lack of funding and a serious lack of housing for dually diagnosed victims. Howard County General Hospital will evaluate victims and allow them to detox, but there is a lack of beds after they are sober. HopeWorks maintains a shelter with twelve (12) beds, but safety must be their priority. If a victim suffers from substance abuse problems or mental health issues they are not permitted to stay in the shelter if their behavior impedes the staff as they must be able to maintain a safe environment for all the residents. Howard County does not have an emergency shelter specifically for dually diagnosed domestic violence victims.

In the case reviewed, the deceased was homeless and had suffered from domestic violence for quite some time. Additionally, she suffered from mental health and substance abuse issues which made it difficult to get her the help she needed. Howard County agencies were not fully equipped to deal with

the multi-layered issues presented by a victim with mental health and substance abuse, especially when that victim was also homeless.

**Recommendations:**

**Short-Term:**

Await recommendations from the Howard County Behavioral Health Task Force that began in June 2014 with a mandate from the County Executive and is slated to produce a final report in March 2015.

**Long-Term:**

Increase crisis beds and long term, affordable treatment for dually diagnosed domestic violence victims.