



Howard County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team Howard County, Maryland

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2013 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 three (3) issues and has agreed upon the following recommendations to address these issues.

1. IMPROVE CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATION WITH DV VICTIMS TO INCREASE SAFETY

Identified Problem:

Many different agencies interact with a domestic violence victim directly following a DV incident, but the contact falls off quickly after the initial contacts are made.

The initial contact is often made by the police who follow the protocol in determining which assessments are appropriate. They also provide referrals if necessary. Officers often refer

the victim to the District Court for civil proceedings; including a Protective or Peace Order.

HopeWorks maintains an advocate on-site to assist in court accompaniment. They are available to provide services and make referrals. A victim advocate from the Sheriff's Office is also notified to assist with filings and make referrals and answer questions. The Sheriff's Office will also conduct follow up with the Petitioner in a granted Protective Order case.

The next contact might be from a Howard County Police Department DV detective, if there are criminal charges pending and the case screens in per protocol. The State's Attorney's Office would then make contact to screen the case. At this point, there is no further specific contact or outreach to the victim until a criminal case, if one is pending, or to the Protective or Peace Order expiration.

In between the time of last contact and court, the perpetrator has access to the victim to continue verbal, emotional or physical abuse. The result often being a victim refusing to cooperate with prosecution or being re-victimized. The amount of support and communication for victim peaks after Protective/Peace or arrest and then declines dramatically.

Recommendations:

Increase contact with victims throughout the process to maintain a support system.

Work to establish follow-up procedures with the HopeWorks to reoffer safety planning, etc. several days and then weeks following the Protective/Peace Order and/or arrest.

Increase contact with the victims through the Sheriff's Office. At the conclusion of the time period, advocate should reach out with additional resource referrals.

Establish emergency contact list to increase the potential for contact with victims in the future, as well as supporting family members and friends. The Sheriff's Office will present the Petitioner with a contact form at the time of the Protective Order hearing. This form will be maintained by the Howard County Police Department Domestic Violence Section. HopeWorks will continue to maintain emergency contact lists for all of its clients, but will only share the information with law enforcement and the SAO in cases where there exists a client release of confidentiality. This will be included in the waiver presently utilized by HopeWorks. The SAO will add an emergency contact list to its questionnaire that is sent to all victims in pending criminal cases.

2. ESTABLISH PROTOCOLS FOR RESPONDING TO CHILDREN WHOSE PARENTS ARE PART OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM AS A VICTIM/DEFENDANT OF A DV HOMICIDE CASE

Identified Problem:

As first responders, there is no set protocol for dealing with children who witness or who are involved in DV incidents/homicides. Presently, the Mobile Crisis Team is called, often by the police, at the time of the incident and they provide immediate crisis intervention services at the scene. The Department of Social Services' (DSS) Child Protective Services unit (CPS) is also called to the scene, typically by the police in order to assess the children in the household and to attempt to place them in the care of a relative or with a foster family as necessary. Although the children may receive immediate crisis counseling at the scene through the Mobile Crisis Team and/or CPS, they may or may not receive follow-up comprehensive counseling or supportive services. The child's school is not generally given information about the child's circumstances in order for the school to provide supportive services. Despite the goal of the DSS to keep siblings together, children may be separated and placed in different homes depending on a number of factors outside of the Department's control. The other parent/family member/substitute caregiver may or may not choose to access available services to help the child recover from the event.

In the one case reviewed by the team, the children came home from school and were present during a portion of the police investigation into their mother's death. The five siblings were initially placed together with the same caregiver during a horribly traumatic situation but ultimately, they were split up after the three fathers individually pursued custody of their respective child/ren.

Recommendations:

1. Short-term:

Improve notification and crisis response management; to include immediate counseling services for children and family resources through the Mental Health Authority/Mobile Crisis Team, DSS, HopeWorks and the Howard County Public School System.

2. Long-term:

Create an informative packet including county resources for the families where the child/ren are placed following the death of a parent due to a DV Homicide. Improve access to crisis counseling and supportive services for the child/ren through the Howard County Public School System.

**3.CREATE A PROTOCOL TO INCLUDE THE HOWARD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM AND
INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS WHEN A CHILD IS INCLUDED IN A PROTECTIVE ORDER**

Identified Problem:

Many Protective/Peace Orders provide for protection for the children of domestic violence victims from the perpetrator. The child/ren's school is not put on notice of the restriction placed on access or even that the perpetrator is not allowed at the school unless the Petitioner makes them aware.

The lack of knowledge by the school administrators about no contact orders could potentially cause a dangerous situation if the perpetrator attempts to remove the child from the school in violation of the Court Order.

Recommendations:

Establish a protocol to improve communication between the Sheriff's Office and the Howard County Public School System to allow notification of schools when no contact Protective/Peace Orders are issued involving children.