



*St. Mary's County,
Maryland*

FY2011

Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team

Annual Report

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Part I. Executive Summary

- **Mission Statement**

The mission of the St. Mary's County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team (DVFRT) is to prevent deaths related to domestic violence and to remember those who have died as a result of domestic violence. To achieve its mission, the team will review a person's life and death and make recommendations to improve the community's response to victims of domestic violence.

- **Purpose**

The primary purpose of the domestic violence fatality review is to prevent deaths related to domestic violence by:

- (1) Promoting a coordinated community response among agencies that provide services related to domestic violence,
- (2) Identifying gaps in service and developing an understanding of the causes that result in deaths related to domestic violence, and
- (3) Recommending changes, plans, and actions to improve:
 - a. Coordination related to domestic violence among member agencies,
 - b. The response to domestic violence by individual member agencies, and
 - c. State and local laws, policies and practices.

Part II. Team Members

- St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office
Tim Cameron, Sheriff
- Southern Maryland Center for Family Advocacy
Laura Joyce, Executive Director
- St. Mary's Hospital
Elizabeth Schafer, Director of Nursing Resources
- Maryland State Police
Lt. Michael Thompson, Commander Barrack T
TFC Bob Reeza

- St. Mary's County States Attorney's Office
Christina Taylor, Assistant State's Attorney
- Three Oaks Center
Harry S. Lancaster, Executive Director
- Walden/Sierra, Inc.
Kathleen O'Brien, Executive Director
- Board of Education
Kathy Lacer, Executive Director Student Services
- Community Representative
Sue Sabo
- St. Mary's County Department of Social Services
Ella May Russell, Director
- Religious Leader
Rev. Rona Harding, Clergy Church of the Ascension
- Commission for Women
Krisanne Bentley
- Survivor/Family Member
Vacant Position
- Department of Parole & Probation
Kim Gregory, Field Supervisor
- St. Mary's County Health Department
Nancy Luginbill

Part III. DVFRT Overview

- **Introduction**

A domestic homicide case was presented by the St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office. Each DVFRT member agency involved in the case also shared pertinent information. The team made recommendations based on the information provided during the review. The team members believe these recommendations may improve services, coordination or services, and investigations among and within member agencies and the system as a whole.

- **2011 Review**

The St. Mary's County DVFRT reviewed one case of domestic homicide which occurred in 2008. The homicide involved a surviving female victim (age 35) and deceased male victim (age 34) who was killed by the female victim's ex-boyfriend (age 31).

Part IV. Findings and Recommendations

Findings:

- The criminal history of the assailant and the previous domestic violence was not used effectively by the courts when determining to release the assailant after a violation of the protective order.
- The victim was not originally receptive to assistance or counseling after prior incidences of domestic violence.
- There are discrepancies in regards to assistance available to victims when applying for protective orders District and Circuit Court.
- Information regarding reporting procedures was not readily available to friends and family members of the assailant when they feared he would harm the victims.
- There was no notification to the surviving victim when the assailant was released after a bond hearing for violating a protective order.
- The victim's demeanor after the incident directly affected the level of assistance/resources offered.

Recommendations:

- To provide continued and on-going follow-up contact with surviving victims and family members even if they are not receptive on first contact
- To educate the community on reporting procedures for friends and family members who believe someone may commit a serious act of domestic violence.
- To ensure accessibility of as much background information as possible for the Judge or District Court Commissioner to review during bond hearings involving protective order violations.
- To evaluate gaps in domestic violence services between District and Circuit Court and use available resources more effectively.
- To expand services available after a domestic violence related fatality to include extended family members and others directly impacted by the incident.
- To house all community domestic violence resources together to allow for more successful communication between agencies and allow victims of domestic violence to seek assistance from all necessary community resources in a single location.

Part V. Status of Prior Recommendations

- The Multi-Agency Lead Case Review Team continues to meet twice monthly. The team consists of law enforcement, prosecutors, advocates, counselors and social service case workers. High lethality cases are reviewed and discussed to ensure victims are receiving assistance from all available resources.
- The State's Attorney's Office and Walden are in the planning stages of establishing a Victim's Services/Domestic Violence Educational Course to educate victims on their rights and possible repercussions of not seeking or cooperating in the prosecution in their domestic violence court case. Any

- victim's requesting a domestic assault case be dismissed may be required to submit proof of attendance for this course.
- A Victim's Advocate from the Southern Maryland Center for Family Advocacy is now available twenty-four hours a day to assist victims in properly completing protective/peace order applications.
 - St. Mary's Hospital Staff have received continuing education training regarding recognizing and reporting domestic violence.

Part VI. Statistical Information

Due to only one case being reviewed a statistical analysis was not available. However; below is pertinent information for future data collection.

Relationship between victim and perpetrator:

- The perpetrator and surviving victim were involved in a heterosexual relationship.
- The perpetrator and victim were not living together at the time of the homicide.
- The deceased victim was the current boyfriend of the surviving victim. They did not reside together at the time of the homicide.

Prior domestic violence reports, arrests or protective order:

- The surviving victim suffered prior domestic violence at the hands of the perpetrator resulting in arrests.
- The surviving victim had a current protective order against the perpetrator and the perpetrator was released on bond for violating the order.

Prior threats:

- The perpetrator made threats against the surviving victim and deceased victim prior to the homicide.

Points of contact with professional intervention prior to the assault (other than law enforcement):

- The surviving victim had contact with emergency room providers after the prior incidents of domestic violence.
- The surviving victim had contact with a domestic violence counseling provider.
- The surviving victim had contact with law enforcement.

Location of the homicide:

- The homicide occurred at the surviving victim's residence.

Means or weapons used:

- A firearm was used in the commission of the homicide.

Substance abuse as a factor:

- Substance abuse was a factor for the perpetrator in the homicide.

Demographics

- The surviving victim was a 35 year old Caucasian female.
- The deceased victim was a 34 year old Caucasian male.
- The perpetrator was a 31 year old Caucasian male.