



King
County
Coalition
Against
Domestic
Violence



King County

Office of the Prosecuting Attorney

Domestic Violence Initiative

Domestic violence is a pernicious crime that persists in King County despite the application of significant resources and attention to end/reduce it. Every year, there are thousands of criminal domestic violence offenses that range from abuse to homicide. While our region's domestic violence problem is not unique, there exist structural, jurisdictional and logistical challenges that undermine our ability to fully address this complex issue. One such challenge is the sheer size and diversity of our region. Contained within our borders are over a dozen advocacy organizations, 39 different municipal jurisdictions, and urban, suburban and rural populations. Without thoughtful and intentional coordination and collaboration, these diverse assets can become challenges. It is critical that our region take practical steps to improve operations, streamline communication, raise standards, and minimize barriers that interfere with victim safety and offender accountability. As a result, we are forming a regional body, the Domestic Violence Initiative, to improve the response of the legal system and related services to domestic violence.

Mission

The goal of the Domestic Violence Initiative Regional Task Force (DVI) will be to deliver practical improvements to our region's legal and "systems-response" to domestic violence.

Scope

The DVI will be informed by a regional discussion about priorities for DV. Community meetings and digital networking tools will be used to identify barriers and find practical solutions to improve the response to DV. The meetings and networking tools will be tied to the 30th year anniversary of RCW 10.99, thereby recognizing how far we have come and planning for where we should go in the future. Efforts will also be made on a continuing basis to reach out to current DV committees/taskforces, community groups, and statewide organizations. This will not be a discussion committee or an informal coordinating body. Instead we will focus on practical improvements to our region's legal response to domestic violence. These decision makers will meet quarterly in a rotating site around the region. The group will draw on input

gathered through the recently launched “[Ideascale](#)”^{1*} on line discussion forum, as well as other reports, to explore potential solutions to problems in systems’ responses to domestic violence.

Sub-committees will be formed to take on practical and specific initiatives and may include practitioners and staff identified by the work group members. Subcommittee work will support but not duplicate existing committee or task force priorities that are ongoing in King County.

In order for the DVI to be successful, it is crucial for the group to have input and feedback from a variety of stakeholders. Toward this end, practitioners from a wide variety of organizations, including community-based victim-advocacy, and criminal justice groups, researched issues and implemented “IdeaScale.”

Feedback so far indicates the need for the following:

- Clear and consistent coordination, sharing of information, and establishment of best practices among between agencies and stakeholders.²
- Improved protection order process and administration
- Understanding the intersection of advocacy and the criminal justice system
- More comprehensive information-sharing about our legal responses to offenders and uniform standards and implementation of offender risk assessment.
- Stronger partnerships with local projects to promote regional response.

*IdeaScale is a web-based technique for collecting community feedback that is used to promote community-wide discussions and to capture new and innovative ideas. The site found at <http://kcpao-dv.ideascale.com/> provides a forum where stakeholders can generate ideas, provide comments, and vote on ideas.

Domestic Violence Ideas Forum

An invitation to join the online Ideas Forum was extended to listservs for the King County Coalition Against Domestic Violence, VAWA STOP grant law enforcement and prosecution , elder abuse council, and KCPAO DV Unit. The online forum was widely used. See report at <http://bit.ly/XFzyW>. The site was viewed at over one thousand locations (i.e. different computers), with over 100 active users who produced 27 ideas that were discussed and commented on. The most active, or most voted-on ideas, are detailed below:

Protection Orders: Forum participants endorsed protection order related ideas as a key legal response to domestic violence. The highest voting totals were for:

¹ All referenced documents are hyperlinked in **brown** to improve access and to save paper. Please contact David Martin at david.martin@kingcounty.gov if there are issues.

² Most of the issues identified in this review are not new, and we are taking an historical perspective by incorporating findings with a wide array of research and previous best practices to develop new strategies, solutions and recommendations.

- "Memoranda of agreement between all jurisdictions in King County on best practices for how Protection Orders are obtained, administered, and processed."
- Improved and more standardized access for protection orders "[a]ccess to the courts to file for temporary protection orders should be more customer friendly....(no standardization)."
- Creating a more formal infrastructure for firearm surrender throughout the protection order process.
- Concern that the Protection Order process is cumbersome and at times can be difficult to administer.

Risk Assessment and legal response: Forum participants endorsed the creation/integration of risk assessment for DV offenders in the criminal justice system.

- "As many in the criminal justice system are moving to risk assessment for issues of bail and probation it is important to have consistent and structured domestic violence data from police reports."
- Acknowledgement that DV offenders benefit and their behavior reinforced when their DV history is not systematically collected or known, or is diffused across information systems (leading to uninformed decision making by the legal system). Id.

Intersection of advocacy and the criminal justice system: Forum participants endorsed building:

- "more formal protocols and working groups between system and community advocates for criminal cases (with linkages to civil cases)" and moving beyond informal working arrangements.
- There were ideas and comments that endorsed reviewing the terms describing advocates as well as how better facilitation of community-based services can be achieved for victims in the criminal justice system. (Significant research and analysis has been done in this area and is discussed in local domestic violence reports detailed below).

Batterer Intervention: There were numerous ideas and comments endorsed in the forum concerning domestic violence batterer treatment or batterer intervention programs.

- The ideas and comments ranged from questioning the efficacy of such treatment to application of different treatment models.³

³ A regional workgroup led by the City of Seattle's Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Prevention office has focused on this issue for the past two years attempting to create a Gold Standard for domestic violence batterers treatment. The project is ongoing and more information can be obtained from linda.olsen@seattle.gov. Significant research has also been done in this area and is discussed in local domestic violence reports detailed below.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with staff and leadership from community based domestic violence agencies (e.g. DAWN, YWCA, EDVP, Chaya), and legal services agencies like NWIRP, as well as City of Seattle Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Prevention office, Seattle Police Department, and King County Sheriff's Office. These interviews were a small sampling of available opinions. However, three themes emerged from the interviews:

Funding: Almost everyone interviewed cited lack of funding as a major issue. The scarcity of funding, particularly due to the recent poor economy, has resulted in cutbacks in DV specific community based programs and law enforcement resources. Some stakeholders reported the lack of funding not only hurts the victims by reducing available support programs and advocacy groups, but causes internal conflicts between the various community and law enforcement agencies competing for what some believe are the same dollars. In addition, the lack of funding makes it difficult to implement the needed developmental changes and upgrades to the systems that facilitate sharing of information, such as offender data bases, and the application of common and consistent protocols across different jurisdictions and municipalities.

Making legal response consistent and accessible: King County has diverse socio-economic, racial, and ethnic populations within a large geographical footprint. Although domestic violence cuts across racial and socio-economic lines, interviews conducted with stakeholders suggest ongoing concerns about underreporting of domestic violence from some ethnic and hard to reach populations, as well as how immigration issues are impacting survivors of domestic violence. See also [Cultural Issues Affecting Domestic violence Service Utilization in Ethnic and Hard to Reach Populations, Seattle-King County Department of Public Health, October 2000.](#)

DV as a High Priority: Another issue mentioned by our stakeholders was the perceived lack of political/executive management support of domestic violence as an important, high priority issue. Further, some stakeholders cited lack of community education on issues of domestic violence issues. See also City of Seattle Domestic Violence Prevention Council Strategic Plan. http://www.seattle.gov/humanservices/domesticviolence/preventioncouncil/DVCriminalJusticeStrategicPlan_20052009.pdf

Brief synopsis of Past Domestic Violence Response Reports⁴

The following reports were created by local domestic violence professionals and highlight the work and analysis that has gone into domestic violence response in this region. The reports are hyperlinked and each provides detailed information, suggestions, and recommendations for improving DV response. The following are brief summaries to acquaint stake holders with the volume of high quality information and study of DV response in this region:

⁴ The reports listed are not all of the reports that have been generated locally in the past decade. A more comprehensive list of reports will be provided in the future.

Cultural Issues Affecting Domestic violence Service Utilization in Ethnic and Hard to Reach Populations, published by the Seattle-King County Department of Public Health, October 2000.

Synopsis: The report reviews the different domestic violence issues facing ethnic and hard to reach populations specifically women from African American, Ethiopian, Cambodian, Filipina, Latina, Native American, Russian, Vietnamese and Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) communities in King County. The study included 254 participants in 38 focus groups and 16 individual interviews. Women were questioned about their experiences in accessing services for their children and what was needed to improve community services. Unique features for these survivors included:

- threats based on immigration visa status,
- threats against extended family,
- using minority status and language competence against women, and
- pressure to accept abuse and not seek help outside of the community.
- Even if help was available, and women knew about it, it was often not culturally or linguistically appropriate, which was a further barrier to gaining assistance.

These public health researchers strongly recommend that community-based domestic violence services address isolation and promote culturally specific social support, outreach for survivors, and community education campaigns.

Victim-Defendants: An Emerging Challenge in Responding to Domestic Violence in Seattle and the King County Region published by King County Coalition Against Domestic Violence, April 2003.

Synopsis: The report examines survivors of Domestic Violence arrested and charged with Domestic Violence in Seattle and King County. The report provides a summary of available information from other states and counties identifying and analyzing the increase in women arrested for domestic violence-related crimes.

The report suggests:

- revisions to policies, procedures, training, community-based services, and state statutes that could decrease the number of domestic violence survivors who are arrested (after acting in self-defense or because they are falsely accused, or misidentified as the primary aggressor),
- hold accountable the battering partners of those domestic violence survivors who are arrested for acting in self-defense, and help increase appropriate intervention, services, and
- support for those domestic violence survivors who are correctly identified as the defendant in the specific incident, but are the victim of ongoing abuse in their relationships.

Strategic Plan on Seattle's Criminal Justice Response to Domestic Violence, published by the City of Seattle Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Prevention Office September, 2005

Synopsis: This report details efforts by the city of Seattle to work towards the reduction of domestic violence. The plan builds upon efforts over the previous decade to address the City of Seattle's criminal justice response to domestic violence and propose new approaches and policies, based on best practice evidence. The report presents a comprehensive assessment of Seattle's past domestic violence response with a focus on the criminal justice system. The information provided in the assessment was used to develop the second strategic plan. This current Domestic Violence Strategic Plan, which focuses on criminal justice, continues Seattle's initial efforts to foster a focused system and promote changing the attitudes and practices within the criminal justice system.

I just wanted to be safe: Battered women's experience with the family law system in King County published by the King County Coalition Against DV 2005.

Synopsis: The KCCADV conducted a study of DV survivors involved with the family law system. The purpose of the study was to assess the responsiveness of the system and obtain information on the problems DV survivors experienced in the family law system. Focus groups were conducted with 48 survivors and five focus groups with 47 community providers in order to gather qualitative information on their experiences with family law proceedings. Survivors identified the following priorities:

- increased safety and security for their children and families by establishing primary custody or sole decision making with the survivor;
- restricted or supervised visitation with the abusive parent;
- establishing provisions for safe exchanges of children;
- enforcement of court orders; and
- enforcement of child support.

King County, Washington State, Safe and Bright Futures Project, Needs Assessment for Infants, Children, and Youth exposed to Domestic Violence published by the Seattle-King County Department of Public Health and Community Partners 2006.

Synopsis: The Safe and Bright Futures for Children's Initiative was a federal program created to support strategic planning regarding infants, children, and youth's exposure to domestic violence (DV). King County was awarded one of twenty-two nationwide grants. Public Health – Seattle & King County, in full partnership with the King County Judicial Administration and their community partners, conducted a needs assessment and wrote a strategic plan. There were three broad recommendations:

- close the service gaps for children and their families. (Noting a lack of specialized services for children affected by DV, the need for children and families to learn about DV and build resiliency, a desire to increase and improve services for battering parents.)
- improve the professional responses to children and families. (That better screening and assessment tools for children and DV were needed along with better coordination and collaboration among service providers).

- develop community strategies that work on the norms and values that perpetuate violence together with community education campaigns.

Fatality Review published by the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence 2008.

Seminal work that examines domestic violence fatalities and makes state wide recommendations in all areas to improve domestic violence response.

Practical Implications of Domestic Violence Research for the Criminal Justice System published by United States Department of Justice—National Institute of Justice June 2009.

The seminal report on all available domestic violence as it relates to the criminal justice system and its practitioners. The report identifies trends in criminal justice system response with analysis and recommendations from available domestic violence research.