



SNAPSHOT SANTA CLARA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

“ Santa Clara County’s inquiry brought forward a recognition that a center can have “good visits” within the span of an hour or two, but noting “good visit” on report after report may reinforce a batterer’s attempt to engage the center in inadvertently supporting ongoing coercion and threats. ”



Santa Clara County

Demonstration Initiative Snapshot

THE COMMUNITIES

Together the three counties participating in the Demonstration Initiative have a combined population of over 2.5 million (between Houston and Chicago, in comparison, if they were one city) and land area of 2,185 square miles. While they share an adjacent geography, the counties range widely in population. San Mateo County is over six times as large as Santa Cruz County. Populations of their major cities range from just over 50,000 in Santa Cruz to 92,000 in San Mateo and nearly 900,000 in San Jose.

Santa Clara County has the largest and most urban population density, as well as over three hundred thousand acres in agricultural production and over six hundred farms producing harvested crops. Agriculture brings migrant workers to both Santa Clara and Santa Cruz Counties (the latter because of its proximity to Monterey County and the Salinas Valley). The 2000 Census provides the following data about county residents' primary racial and ethnic identities and language spoken at home.

American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities range from 0.1% to 1.3% of the population across the three counties. In San Mateo County, the largest Asian communities are Chinese (6.9%) and Filipino (8.3%). In Santa Clara, largest Asian communities are Asian Indian (4%), Chinese (6.9%), Filipino (4.5%), and Vietnamese (5.9%). In each county, nearly a quarter of the population identifies as Hispanic or Latino. Santa Cruz County has the highest percentage of families with children under age eighteen living below the official poverty level (11.1%), followed by Santa Clara (6.8%) and San Mateo (4.9%). This compares to a rate for California of 14.3%.

Santa Clara County administered the Supervised Visitation Program Demonstration Initiative grant through its Office of the County Counsel. Local project directors also served as directors of their respective visitation centers: Beth McNamara in San Mateo and Jennifer Rose in Santa Cruz.

The centers had experience working together prior to the Demonstration Initiative as part of a five-county collaboration known as Safe Connections for Kids, funded by the California Office of the Courts to provide safe access and exchange in the South Bay Area. The Demonstration Initiative involved key community partners among the courts and domestic violence advocacy organizations.

County	Population	Hispanic or Latino (any race)	White	African American	Asian	Speak another language other than English at home
Santa Cruz	255,602	26.8%	75.1%	1%	3.4%	27.8%
San Mateo	707,161	21.9%	59.5%	3.5%	20%	41.5%
Santa Clara	1,682,585	24%	57.6%	2.8%	25.6%	45.4%
California	36,457,585	35.2%	77%	6.7%	12.2%	17.9%



SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

- Santa Cruz Safe Connections for Kids, a program of the Walnut Avenue Women's Center, a domestic violence victim services agency
- Walnut Avenue Women's Center
- Santa Cruz County Superior Court and Family Court Services

SAN MATEO COUNTY

- Family Visitation Center, a program of Family Service Agency of San Mateo County, a human services agency
- C.O.R.A., a domestic violence victim services agency
- San Mateo County Superior Court and Family Court Services

SANTA CLARA COUNTY

- Family Access Program of Santa Clara County, a program of Community Solutions, a human services agency (to 2005)
- Next Door Solutions to Domestic Violence
- Santa Clara County Superior Court and Family Court Services

Community Solutions of Santa Clara County decided to withdraw its participation when the organization closed its supervised visitation center in 2005. Next Door Solutions to Domestic Violence stepped in as the new supervised visitation partner. Next Door Solutions is a domestic violence victim services agency that had been a collaborating partner in the Demonstration Initiative.¹⁹

19. A fourth visitation center and community, Community Human Services of Monterey County, participated in the initiative early on, but withdrew after the court partner was unable to remain involved at the level required by the Office on Violence Against Women.

AN ESSENTIAL DISCUSSION

How does the work of a visitation center produce or not produce safety for everyone involved?

As part of the Demonstration Initiative, the Santa Clara County collaborating partners and the Supervised Visitation Program's national technical assistance partners (Praxis International and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges) conducted a Safety Audit.²⁰ The centers and their community partners wanted to learn more about how safety was defined, shaped, and acknowledged in visitation and exchange services.

One center director summed up their exploration of safety in this way: "I think it was a surprise to us, the extent to which philosophy around this issue didn't hold true to practice around the work [of supervised visitation and exchange]. We can talk about being here to keep victims and children safe, but our thinking didn't go through to how the work impacts victim safety."

20. Information on the Praxis Safety and Accountability Audit, and the Demonstration Initiative is available at www.praxisinternational.org.

The Santa Clara County visitation programs made the following discoveries when they examined whether and how supervised visitation was organized around equal regard for the safety of children and adult victims.

- The visitation centers received incomplete information from judges and custody evaluators about the level of potential danger
- Families using the visitation center did not always understand the safety precautions put in place around arrivals, departures, and visits
- The work of visitation monitors was not organized to fully account for battering behaviors and how those might be used to engage the center in inadvertently colluding with the battering parent
- The visitation centers collected and recorded a large volume of information without a clear sense of its purpose or importance to safety and risk in the context of battering
- The visitation centers did not have an ongoing, active dialogue with the parent who had been battered, or with the children or the battering parent
- Monitor training, preparation, and skill level sometimes left monitors inadequately prepared for supervision and exchange cases involving battering
- Community-based advocates, batterer intervention programs, and visitation centers were poorly linked
- The role of the visitation center in relation to post-separation violence and safety had not been clearly articulated or explored

Santa Clara County's inquiry brought forward a recognition that a center can have "good visits" within the span of an hour or two, but noting "good visit" on report after report may reinforce a batterer's attempt to engage the center in inadvertently supporting ongoing coercion and threats. Not a single staff member in any visitation center wanted to be in that position. Above all, they recognized that there can be no single, predetermined safety plan that fits every victim of battering walking through a center's doors. Locks and bolts will be important to some victims' safety and well-being, but so will knowing whether or not a violent partner has been arrested between one visit and the next or whether the final divorce hearing has been scheduled.

SHIFTS IN THINKING AND PRACTICE

The following table presents highlights of Santa Clara County's work, but should not be read as capturing the full breadth and depth of their work or every dimension of change within the demonstration project and the Supervised Visitation Program. It reviews seven areas of exploration and change that were the focus of the larger initiative: meeting the needs of adult and child victims, partnerships with domestic violence advocates, relationships with the courts, cultural accessibility, consulting committees, security measures, and sustainability.

Santa Clara County benefited from their existing collaboration and experience working together. The project capitalized on the commitment and participation of its local consulting committee to expand the wider community response to and understanding of supervised visitation in the context of domestic violence. "Keep bringing everyone to the table," is a unanimous recommendation by all partners: visitation centers, domestic violence advocacy programs, and courts.

This collected work produced a set of revised forms and procedures related to court referrals, client registration and orientation, observation notes, client check-ins, and reports back to the court. Across this process the project partners sought to:

- make the changing safety needs of each family more visible;
- emphasize building positive, respectful relationships with family members from the very first contact;
- tie observations and reporting to safety and ongoing coercion and control (rather than documentation of routine parent-child interactions);
- articulate the limitations of inferring future safety from the controlled environment of supervised visitation or exchange; and,
- improve working relationships between the centers and the courts.

The Santa Clara County Demonstration Initiative also created a common statement of mission, philosophy, and principles to guide parents and the centers. "We believe: every person has the right to a safe environment free from violence; that our community has a responsibility to ensure safety for all family members; and, that people have the potential to grow and deserve the opportunity to develop their strengths over their weaknesses."

As the Demonstration Initiative came to a close, the collaborative partners found sustainability to be among their greatest challenges. All three visitation centers experienced a significant turnover in staff and leadership. In the local evaluation, partners cited securing stable financial resources and staff as ongoing challenges. The umbrella organizations for the centers in Santa Clara and Santa Cruz, both domestic violence service agencies, decided to close the centers. The changes left the collaborative partners regrouping to determine how best to continue the work of the initiative and provide visitation services in those communities that reflected the new philosophy and practice.





SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

NEEDS OF ADULT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THEIR CHILDREN

- Awareness of complex needs and ways in which batterers can continue harassment by using the center, court process, or the financial burden of ongoing litigation
- “It’s not just about protecting the children and the victim while they are using the center. The safety and planning precautions need to happen outside the center.”
- Significance of post-separation issues and safety needs of adult victims
- “We moved away from the community belief that centers exist solely to provide fathers’ access to children.”
- Recognition that many adult victims saw visitation as a “service to support batterers” rather than a service to support their safety
- “Understanding safety as something more dynamic and changing, and not static”
- “Invest in battered women and children so they can be more active in informing the work of visitation centers, the courts, and DV programs.”
- Recognition that not every child wants contact with parent or parents
- Recognition that supervised visitation services are not suitable for every batterer
- Recognition that some batterers can change how they parent, and visitation center can help support that change
- Requires examining, developing, and implementing policies and programming to respond to victims of battering who are the visiting parent
 - Examine how institutional responses create these situations, including court’s role and legal constraints in decision-making

- √ Ongoing conversation and “purposeful, intentional time to spend checking in” with all family members
 - Requires attention to documentation and handling information that might compromise victim safety
- √ Increase attention to victims’ fears
- √ New approach to orientations: emphasis on conversation and relationship-building
 - Administrative details, demographic information, information requested by funding sources, etc. on form completed in advance
 - First appointment can focus on understanding fears and expectations around visitation services
 - More attention to unique safety needs
- √ Met challenge of batterers calling law enforcement when a child refused to visit by engaging law enforcement agencies and the courts to create child-friendly policies and protocols
- √ Visitation center staff on-site at the court to explain services, assist in completing the necessary registration paperwork, schedule orientation, and be available to ease anxiety about visitation or exchange
- √ Link women, men and children with ancillary services and resources, such as support groups around battering and parenting issues
- √ Establish advisory councils for adult victims and children to help guide visitation practices
- √ Ground center practices in the broad and diverse experiences of battered women
- √ Develop more flexibility around children who do not want to visit



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

NEEDS OF ADULT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THEIR CHILDREN

- Develop a local response when visitation staff feel using visitation center services comprises the safety of survivors and/or children
 - Understanding and protocol
 - Communicating the center concerns to the court
 - Court's options and response
- Develop programming to support victims

- Take more time to talk and work with child before services begin and before and after every visit/exchange
- Parents agree to center principles, including: “We refrain from forcing children to do anything before, during, or after the visit that makes them uncomfortable. This includes – but is not limited to – participating in a visit/exchange when they do not want to...”
- Prepare parents for visits to support process and help make visitation successful
- Work with court to develop protocol and understanding of steps center takes to support children
- Parents and children may need to meet with staff and come to the center multiple times before visits begin

PARTNERSHIP WITH BATTERED WOMEN'S ADVOCACY PROGRAMS

- Meeting the ideals of the Demonstration Initiative requires building a partnership between the visitation center and advocacy programs
- Requires time, work, and effort: visitation and advocacy programs are isolated from one another, even when in the same agency
- A visitation center should not be the strongest advocacy voice in a community
- Much remains to be done in understanding the different types of domestic violence
 - DV agencies see more battering (i.e., ongoing pattern of coercion and control)
 - Courts see more kinds of violence between intimate partners

- ✓ Provide an advocate to be available to and work with victims at the visitation center
- ✓ Cross training and cross problem-solving between visitation centers and advocacy programs
- ✓ Work closer on a day-to-day basis
- ✓ “Case consultation and regular team meetings assist in enhancing everyone's knowledge, understanding, and capacity to best serve families”
 - Requires attention to confidentiality issues and limitations to put in place related to confidentiality



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

PARTNERSHIP WITH BATTERED WOMEN'S ADVOCACY PROGRAMS

- “We need to create an advocacy institute, perhaps, to provide post-separation advocacy and to find out what women really need and want. Where does she want to talk about what's going on? It might be at the beauty shop or housing center or WIC [nutrition] program.”
- ✓ Provide advocacy and support for battered women around the long-term consequences of living with battering and its impact on parenting
 - Not the role of a visitation center
 - Must come through community-based programs
- ✓ Visitation center can provide a place to talk with someone or use a computer during that one hour while her children are visiting with their father

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE COURTS

- Requires building relationships with court staff as well as judges
- Understanding that clear communication between the courts and visitation centers benefits everyone
- “We worked more closely with DV agencies and with the visitation agencies that we would have without this project.”
- Shift to new forms and processes is a long process, from discussion and drafting to getting staff used to new ways of working
- Incomplete court referrals impact safety and security
- Develop a local response when visitation staff feel that terminating visits would move a court to unsupervised visits and thereby compromise the safety of survivors and/or children
- ✓ Examine and resolve understanding of what can be shared with visitation center, under what circumstances, and how
- ✓ Establish new referral process
 - Distinguish reason for referral (i.e., domestic violence related or other)
 - Highlight “impressions, allegations or evidence of risk”
- ✓ Establish new court report process that emphasizes the reason for referral and conduct that impacts safety before, during, and after a visit or exchange
- ✓ Shift in relationships between center staff, courts, and family court services: ongoing meetings, education, cross training
- ✓ Ongoing cross training so that relationships and information are not lost during staff turnover



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE COURTS

- Understanding and protocol
- Communicating the center’s concerns
- Court’s options and response
- Understanding that visitation centers do not have a legal way to protect information and ensure confidentiality
- Explore documentation practices with the court
 - Impact of documentation
 - How the court uses center documentation
 - Unintended consequences
- Explore assumptions that a batterer’s visits at the center will probably go without incident at the center (“good behavior” at a center does not mean that battering behavior is no longer a concern)
- Examine how to communicate battering behavior that occurs at the center to the court, and the impact such information can have

- ✓ Develop ways for court staff and visitation staff to experience each other’s work: “see the world from another perspective” or “walk in each other’s shoes” and understand the dilemmas and constraints each other face in responding to domestic violence
- ✓ Build opportunities and training for judges and court staff to examine how to determine
 - Who is danger from whom and in what ways
 - When supervised visitation or exchange is safe and when it is not
 - Length of supervision and process of safe transition to unsupervised access
 - Options when supervised visitation or exchange is not safe

CULTURAL ACCESSIBILITY

- Integrate into philosophy and programming: “it can’t be a special training topic once every six months”
- Cannot be limited to language translation
- Cannot be limited to visitation center, but extend to courts, domestic violence agencies, and other community interveners
- Impact of high cost of living in region on hiring and retaining bilingual, bicultural staff
- Ensure that center is responsive to the background, circumstances, and cultures of the communities and families being served

- ✓ Create satellite sites for safe visitation and exchange services to under-served communities (single location can limit accessibility)
- ✓ “Find systems and funding to support on-going feedback and input from diverse women and children”
- ✓ Increase bilingual, bicultural staff that is representative of the community
- ✓ Develop policy and guidelines based on input and from diverse communities



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

CONSULTING COMMITTEES

- Determine who is not being served and consult with specific communities to develop a culturally respectful program
- Explore alternative models of and approaches to supervised visitation
 - A “center” or its current design might not be the safest and best way to ensure safety for battered women and their children in every community
- “We were able to tap into the expertise of many of our consulting committee members to provide overall guidance into the work and to help us think through very specific issues, such as confidentiality and record keeping, documentation, and the court referral form”
- Reinforce visitation services as part of overall response to domestic violence
- Visitation practices must be linked with and integral to coordinated community response
- Difficult to maintain understanding and momentum around integration of visitation services and response to domestic violence at all levels of each partner agency and system
 - Requires participation and action beyond individual members of a consulting committee
- Collaboration enhances overall understanding and attention to domestic violence and increased safety and sensitivity for adult victims
- Collaboration and coordinated community response are essential to realizing the philosophy and goals of the Supervised Visitation Program in building visitation services that account for battering and domestic violence
- Moved too quickly in establishing consulting committee, before developing a clear sense of the Demonstration Initiative’s needs

- √ Provide opportunities for visitation participants and members of their wider communities to advise center on how to increase its outreach, service capacity, and accessibility to diverse communities
 - Focus groups
 - Interviews
 - Surveys
 - Community forums
- √ Involve a greater number of people in each participating system in planning and implementation
 - Avoid isolating changes in one or two practitioners in a single agency or system
 - Include participation from “front-line” workers, as well as administrators and policy-makers
 - Drawn on the collaboration to hold specialized trainings
 - Use the collaboration to build buy-in, support, and recognition of united goal in building safety for victims of battering and their children
 - “Keep bringing everyone to the table”



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

SECURITY MEASURES

- “We realized that centers were creating the safety and security plan for every client in the same ways. Individual needs around safety and security were not accounted for.”
- Requires ongoing conversations with women, men, and children in order to respond and adjust security as needed
- Staff perceptions of security needs may differ from a victim’s perceptions of her needs
- “Partnership with local police, staff training and support, and support from other service providers are all just as important because the security of the clients before and after a visit is sometimes harder to achieve than during the visit.”
- Often greater needs around safety and security in supervised exchanges rather than visits
- “At least during visitation, the center can help keep the children safe. In exchanges, a batterer can continue to intimidate the children and put them in the middle.”
- Security measures build staff confidence that they are in a protected environment
- Security measures tell victims that the center takes domestic violence seriously and is aware that it can occur anywhere
- Ongoing brainstorming with grant partners and the consulting committee and training helps identify security problems
- Important to build in ways for those using the center to contribute to discussions about safety and security (e.g., ongoing check-ins, focus groups)
- Courts, police, and centers need to work out response around termination of visitation services

- √ “It was a collaborative decision that our centers would not have on-site security guards, metal detectors, or hand wands.”
 - Consider impact of policing and heavy surveillance approach on communities and people’s experiences with institutions, particularly criminal legal system
 - Reliance on guards and metal detectors can be a false sense of security
- √ Diminish staff’s ongoing conversation and consultation with victims about their specific safety needs over time and
- √ Diminish attention to batterer’s concerns and responses around his former partner and children (e.g., a final divorce action, which increases risk)
 - Emphasis on building respectful relationships in ways that promote communication, identify ongoing safety needs, and reduce batterer hostility and aggression
 - Wide array of less intrusive security measures available, such as:
 - Automatic locking doors
 - More secure barriers between waiting rooms
 - Audio and/or video in parking areas, entrances, exits, waiting and visitation areas
 - Panic buttons
 - Intercom system
 - Increased lighting
 - Partnerships with local law enforcement
 - Staff training and awareness of how to treat people with compassion and respect



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

SECURITY MEASURES

- Address cases where center is holding back on a termination action based on fear that court will respond in an inappropriate way (i.e., grantless supervised access)
- Requires law enforcement representation on consulting committee

- ✓ Conduct a thoughtful, thorough evaluation of the center's safety and security needs
- ✓ Develop a way to have ongoing conversations about safety and security concerns
- ✓ New approach to orientations with noncustodial parents seems to reduce aggression toward staff
- ✓ Link battering parents with specialized classes on impact of battering on children
- ✓ Provide free support groups for victims and their children as a way to improve services, including security measures
- ✓ Use adult victim and children's advisory councils to help identify security needs
- ✓ Expand services to enable center to provide transportation for visits or exchanges, according to safety issues for specific families
- ✓ Build a secure outdoor setting for visits
- ✓ Provide cell phones to high-risk participants
- ✓ Connect victims with legal assistance to help examine options
- ✓ Notify law enforcement if services have been terminated for safety reasons so that battering parent can't manipulate police into facilitating an exchange or visit
 - Message from court to police: "Don't enforce the order. I want to see them back in court if the visitation center has terminated services"



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

SUSTAINABILITY

- “Supervised visitation is now seen as a way in which each community responds to domestic violence and is seen as a valued post-separation service”
- Recognition across the collaboration of how centers struggle with the cost of providing services and how limited funding affects what they can offer
- Requires creating partnerships that can pull resources together
- Requires that advocacy community take up visitation as a critical post-separation issue and service for battered women
- Visitation services are not viable long range without state and federal subsidy
- Challenge to find funding streams with similar goals and missions that does not compromise the philosophical approach to the work
- “Our greatest challenge is that the need for safe visitation and exchange services exceeds our fiscal capability to accommodate everyone”

- ✓ Available to all who need visitation services regardless of financial situation
- ✓ Subsidize visitation so that children can spend more time with supervised parent
- ✓ Provide guidance and ways for visitation services to communicate program effectiveness, the value of their work, and the ways in which visitation services support the larger community response to domestic violence
- ✓ Develop strong community support for services
- ✓ Develop strong and efficient personnel and fiscal management, support all personnel as effective communicators of program services
- ✓ Determine the fiscal and social impact (direct and indirect) of the program on other systems and organizations in your community



SNAPSHOT THE CITY OF CHICAGO

“ Each of the Chicago centers
is grounded in a parent agency
with a culturally-specific history
and perspective, experience they
brought to the examination of
visitation services in a large,
diverse urban community. ”



The City of Chicago

Demonstration Initiative Snapshot

THE COMMUNITY

With just under three million people, Chicago is the third largest city in the country. As reported in the 2000 Census, 21.7% of its residents were foreign born and 35.5% speak a language other than English at home. In recognition of this diversity, voting information has been translated into the top fifteen languages other than English spoken in the homes of Chicago public school students. As part of “The Great Migration” in the first half of the 20th century, hundreds of thousands of African Americans settled in Chicago, building the base for one of the country’s strongest African American communities, and nearly 37% of the city’s current population. In the last census, 26% of city residents identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino, and Chicago is the second largest Polish city in the world, outside of Warsaw. Immigration has been a significant factor in population growth in the wider metropolitan area, with the leading countries including Mexico, Poland, and India. Immigrants come with extraordinary diversity of experience, tradition, education, literacy, English proficiency, and income.

According to the 2000 Census, nearly 17% of Chicago families live below the official poverty level, including over 40% of the female householders with children under age eighteen. While nearly a third of renters pay more than 35% of their income for housing, 20% pay more than half. According to the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, only 10% of the affordable housing need is currently met. Almost 45% of

homeless residents are families with children. Each of the three Chicago visitation and exchange centers is located within a larger organization that was founded with a specific cultural identity. They brought this experience to the Demonstration Initiative.

APNA GHAR (OUR HOME) was founded in 1989 to provide support and services to women experiencing domestic violence who came from the countries of India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. It sought to provide a place where women and their children could find help in ways that acknowledged their languages, dress, foods, religions, family structures, and values. It now provides a crisis line, shelter, counseling, translation, legal advocacy, housing and employment assistance, and supervised child visitation. Apna Ghar is located in the top 'port of entry' for new immigrants to Chicago. Over 43% of the population in its zip code area speaks a language other than English at home.

THE BRANCH FAMILY INSTITUTE (BRANCH) grew from E.M. Branch & Associates, Inc., a clinical practice established to provide culturally relevant services to African American individuals, families, and communities. The non-profit institute was founded to expand counseling services to low-income families. Branch seeks to account for the impact of poverty, racism, and oppression in the lives of the people it works with. In 2002, the Chicago Department of Human Services contracted with Branch to begin operating a supervised visitation center.



MUJERES LATINAS EN ACCIÓN (MUJERES) is located in one of the largest Mexican communities in the United States. It describes itself as a “bilingual/bicultural agency.” Over the past thirty years, it has developed support for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, including crisis intervention, a 24-hour crisis line, counseling, legal advocacy, and housing assistance. It also provides free childcare for parents using the agency’s services. In 2001, Mujeres began to provide supervised visitation services after another agency in the community ceased operation.

The Chicago Supervised Visitation Program Demonstration Initiative grant was administered by the city’s Department of Human Services. Staff from the Mayor’s Office on Domestic Violence served as project directors: Beth Chaplin, Leslie Landis, and Emily Muskovitz. The visitation centers’ were represented primarily by Bob Gallenbach, Apna Ghar; Helena Sugano, Mujeres Latinas en Acción; and, Brenda Thompson, Branch Family Institute.

The Demonstration Initiative also involved community partners among the courts, domestic violence advocacy organizations, and other members participating in the project’s local consulting committee. Members included representatives from the judiciary in the Cook County Circuit Court Domestic Relations Division, Cook County Court Marriage and Family Counseling Services, Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Chicago Department of Human Services, Chicago Department of Public Health, Chicago Police Department, Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women’s Network, YWCA Children’s Rise Center, La Familia Unida, and Life Span’s domestic violence legal services program.

AN ESSENTIAL DISCUSSION

How does culture play a role in serving families using supervised visitation?

As part of the Demonstration Initiative, the Chicago centers and the Supervised Visitation Program's national technical assistance partners (Praxis International and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges) conducted a Safety Audit to explore how visitation services account for peoples' cultures and identities.²¹

21. Information on the Praxis Safety and Accountability Audit, and the Demonstration Initiative is available at www.praxisinternational.org.

22. From the Chicago Safety Audit report, *A Discussion of Accounting for Culture in Supervised Visitation Practices*: "What do we mean by culture? It is easy to equate culture with race or ethnicity, and stop there; or, to see it as a set of fixed, stable patterns of belief and behavior. Culture is the complex, symbolic frame of reference shared by a group of people. It takes in the totality of world view, behavior patterns, art, beliefs, language, institutions, and other products of human work and thought. Its many aspects are dynamic, diverse, and often misperceived by those inside and outside the group. It is contradictory, carrying values that can be both oppressive and nurturing at the same time. Culture develops and continues to evolve in relation to changing social and political contexts, based on race, ethnicity, national origin, sexuality, gender, religion, age, class, disability status, immigration status, education, geography, special interests, and time. A person's cultural identity is multi-faceted, with elements that are clear, ambiguous, changing, and sometimes contradictory. A person can claim multiple cultural locations and intersections."

23. Melanie Tervalon and Jann Murray-García. 1998. Cultural Humility Versus Cultural Competence: A Critical Distinction in Defining Physician Training Outcomes in Multicultural Education. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, 9:2, 117-125. For Tervalon and Murray-García the qualities of cultural "humility" include respect, dialogue, awareness, and reflection. While their article centers on health care, the Chicago centers found that the authors' discussion of cultural humility resonated with how the centers' approach their work.

The Chicago partners recognized that at one level their question had a ready and simple answer: of course "culture" plays a role in supervised visitation.²² Everything a visitation center does and every aspect of its organization has cultural dimensions and impact. There is no visitation center or service that is culturally neutral. Chicago wanted to examine the complexity of accounting for people's unique cultures and identities, however, and to explore ways of thinking about these aspects of supervised visitation. That led to the idea of *cultural humility* as a life-long commitment to self-evaluation, self-critique, and advocacy partnerships with communities.²³

Chicago offered examples of cultural humility in action, with the caveat that any such measures are only taken in the **context of safety for adult victims and their children**.

- Define a clear identity that is separate from the court
- Structure adequate time and flexibility into all interactions with children and parents
- Invite diverse community organizations to walk through the center's space and procedures and provide a critique
- Prepare center staff to work with battering parents
- Use staff meetings, ad hoc work groups, community members, and parents to help examine every aspect of the center's design and the implied and explicit messages about who is welcome and how they are valued
- Prepare staff to support parents and children to lead with the language of their choice
- Provide opportunities for extended family to be involved

- Hold an all-center gathering to help bridge cultures and contribute to an atmosphere of warmth and respect for families
- Support families' food, music, and religious traditions
- Build processes for expanding the center's understanding of families' experiences with the courts, police, Social Security, welfare, medical, psychology, and other intervening institutions, both individually and historically

The Chicago partners recognized that asking this question is only the beginning of the discussion. There is no single answer, no one-dimensional response. It prompts many other questions to pursue in that practice of ongoing study, self-reflection, and partnership. What culture dominates? How do visitation services account for indigenous cultures and ways of knowing? How can we make supervised visitation and exchange an experience with minimal barriers? How can we make supervised visitation welcoming, respectful, and aware of the lives of everyone who comes through the door? How might the idea of safe visitation and exchange look without the physical space of a center? How can we facilitate families' cultural identities, as well as accommodate them? How would protective or monitored contact between a child and a parent look for different cultures, if they could figure it out from the ground up?

SHIFTS IN THINKING AND PRACTICE

The exploration of cultural accessibility described above was a hallmark of Chicago's participation in the Demonstration Initiative. The following table presents other highlights, but should not be read as capturing the full breadth and depth of Chicago's work or every dimension of change within the demonstration project and the Supervised Visitation Program. It reviews seven areas of exploration and change that were the focus of the larger initiative: meeting the needs of adult and child victims, partnerships with domestic violence advocates, relationships with the courts, cultural accessibility, consulting committees, security measures, and sustainability.

Two of the three Chicago visitation centers were programs of domestic violence service agencies, which meant that all of the visitation center staff had completed the forty-hour training that advocates and volunteers working with victims also receive. That removes an additional step in integrating supervised visitation services into the continuum of domestic violence victim services and the overall coordinated community response.

The Chicago Demonstration Initiative, with support from the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, conducted training involving the forty-plus members of the domestic relations court judiciary. With the exception of a few judges held back for emergency court proceedings or other commitments, the entire family court bench participated. Chicago paid particular attention to “maintaining a respectful yet independent relationship between the centers and the court system,” while building an understanding of the scope and role of supervised visitation and exchange in domestic violence cases. It also emphasized integrating visitation services into the wider coordinated community response to domestic violence as a significant part of sustained advocacy and safety for battered women and their children.

Each of the Chicago centers is grounded in a parent agency with a culturally-specific history and perspective, experience they brought to the examination of visitation services in a large, diverse urban community. The reality of providing supervised visitation and exchange has been that each center serves families from multiple ethnic and cultural backgrounds, although this is less true for Mujeres than for the other centers. In a congested urban setting, parents are eager to minimize travel time and expenses, whether traveling via public transportation or private vehicle, and often seek visitation services closest to their home or children’s school. The distance between Apna Ghar and Branch Family Institute, for example, is twenty-two miles. While Chicago is the third largest city in the country, the three centers are the only supervised visitation programs in the city providing services specific to domestic violence. The services are also provided free of charge.

As the Demonstration Initiative concluded, the Chicago centers had doubled their service capacity, using the federal Supervised Visitation Program grant to expand beyond initial city support from Chicago Community Development Block Grant funds. Advocacy and support from the local project coordinator, the Mayor’s Office on Domestic Violence (MODV), helped develop new sources of financial support for the three visitation centers, including: Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, Illinois Violence Prevention Authority, Chicago Department of Children and Youth, and a private foundation. MODV is coordinating an effort to secure more long range stability via a permanent and earmarked source of state revenue, both to support services in Chicago and encourage expansion of the philosophy and practices of the Demonstration Initiative statewide.



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

NEEDS OF ADULT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THEIR CHILDREN

- Services must be community-specific and cannot be one-size-fits-all
- Rethinking confidentiality and limitations of state law
 - Assumed more confidentiality for visitation centers than exists
 - Recognition that communications with client families and services provided were not confidential
 - Impact on documentation, court forms, safety check-ins
- First contact is “an important and irreplaceable part” in developing positive relationships between centers and families, with an impact on services that follow at every juncture
- Victims of domestic violence do not necessarily perceive visitation centers and services as positive
 - Victims see center as primarily for the abusive parent, not victim parent
- Require ongoing attention to noncustodial victim parents and their advocacy and service needs

- ✓ Impact of confidentiality limitations
 - Requires guidelines for obtaining and sharing client information
 - Safety check-ins with victims between visit and attention to what happens with that information
 - “Documentation cut back dramatically”
 - Limit detailed narrative in notes
 - Create separate files for each person rather than a “family” file
- ✓ “Work around how, when, and realities of parents getting to the center. Now part of safety planning: How are you going to get here, what bus? Buying bus passes, locating cab fare...”
- ✓ Conversational approach to first appointments (i.e., “intake”), with time to explain program and its concepts
 - Emphasize “open dialogue”
 - De-emphasize filling out a form as goal
- ✓ Explore on-site ancillary community services that may be helpful to each family member
- ✓ Consider services in alternative locations, such as home environment, mall, park (while addressing safety considerations)
- ✓ Expand visitation centers’ knowledge of local laws regarding divorce and custody



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

PARTNERSHIPS WITH BATTERED WOMEN'S ADVOCACY PROGRAMS

- Visitation services are part of sustained advocacy and safety for adult victims and their children
- Advocacy related to post-separation violence is not the visitation center's role
- Victims being served by supervised visitation have not been those served by battered women's programs
- Requires thinking about advocacy in many settings and many ways, e.g., connection with faith communities, health care providers
- Recognition that advocates saw a center's very existence as creating the opportunity for colluding with a batterer to further coercion and control, by providing direct access to the children and ultimately to their mother
- Effective partnership requires funding sources for visitation services that do not diminish support for advocacy services
- Large task in a major urban setting with as many domestic violence service related agencies
- Meeting victims' needs tied to providing legal representation and links through advocacy programs

- ✓ Infuse Safe Havens (Supervised Visitation Program) concepts into the advocacy community's work
- ✓ Include visitation centers as a referral source in Chicago Domestic Violence Help Line database
- ✓ Establish cross referrals between domestic violence agencies and visitation centers
- ✓ Visitation center staff complete 40-hour domestic violence training
- ✓ Watch for ways in which advocacy and visitation center roles start to blur
- ✓ "Although centers can't be direct advocates, we can advocate for the prevention of domestic violence."
- ✓ Requires increasing the capacity of visitation centers if domestic violence agencies are to routinely recommend that victims use visitation services
- ✓ Contract with domestic violence legal service for case consultation
- ✓ Cross training between visitation centers and domestic violence advocates, visitation centers and legal services

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE COURTS

- "Centers best service their clients by maintaining a respectful and independent relationship from the court system, while partnering with the courts to ensure appropriate referrals, understanding of the centers' service capacities, and safety of domestic violence victims."
- Integrate visitation services into options and remedies available to the court in cases involving domestic violence

- ✓ Expand court's understanding of the visitation center's role in refusing and terminating cases and crafting a safe judicial response
- ✓ Develop court referral form that provides necessary information about a family and the reason for the referral
- ✓ Conduct training on supervised visitation and domestic violence issues for entire domestic relations court



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE COURTS

- Requires court understanding of the scope of visitation services
- Build court understanding that “supervised visits that occur without incident do not necessarily indicate that a noncustodial parent should be granted unsupervised visitation or exchanges”

- ✓ Centers will not provide routine reports to the courts; reports generated only at request of parties/clients
- ✓ Develop a court reporting form and process to address
 - Communicating center’s determination that a case is too dangerous for visitation services or child is too distressed
 - Avoiding judicial response that grants unsupervised visitation in response

CULTURAL ACCESSIBILITY

- A center’s physical setting and security are intertwined
 - “It’s important to stress the concept of community-based sites, versus housed in a legal facility, courthouse, or police station”
 - A stronger policing type atmosphere (i.e., armed guards and metal detectors) may reinforce experiences of oppression for some communities
- Requires ongoing reflection and study of visitation center’s design and practices, both deliberate and less intentional
- Identify and name the steps in providing services that are culturally respectful and culturally relative
- Recognition of wider need for interpretation services beyond the center already providing them
- “Many cultural and ethnic communities do not seek out supervised visitation and exchange services, which is a particular concern within a city that is so diverse”

- ✓ Design security measures that do not rely on armed guards and metal detectors
- ✓ Change observation practices and forms to exclude cultural assumptions about “appropriate” affection, play, and other aspects of parent and child interactions
- ✓ Establish an identity separate from the court
- ✓ See additional examples in the previous section of the snapshot, “An essential discussion,” on the Chicago Demonstration Initiative’s exploration of accounting for culture in supervised visitation practices



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

CONSULTING COMMITTEES

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Integrate visitation centers and Safe Havens philosophy into existing community collaboration• Use to inform the Demonstration Initiative, including new approaches to documentation and forms, protocols and procedures• Key benefit is improved understanding of each agency’s function and the scope of services provided by the visitation centers• Role in developing financial stability for visitation services that maintain and expand the philosophy and practices of the Demonstration Initiative | <ul style="list-style-type: none">√ Bring center directors onto larger coordinated community response council√ Provide an avenue for comprehensive training to centers on relevant family law and immigration√ Bring court system and supervised visitation programs to the same forum and promote change of information, ideas, and discussions of the ways in which they interact and coexist√ Provide training to systems represented on the local consulting committee, such as training on custody and visitation in domestic violence cases to court mediation unit, or training to police on visitation center practices√ Develop a working relationship that allows each system to maintain its separate identity, e.g., courts and visitation centers able to work together while the centers maintain individual identity as an independent, non-court-based service√ Expand to include representatives of local and state funders in order to promote uniformity of understanding and support for service models and relationships developed under the initiative |
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SECURITY MEASURES

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Goal: providing security through the least invasive and most unobtrusive methods• Security has cultural and urban contexts; must consider implications of security and setting• Recognize how urban settings impact and limit security measures (e.g., public transportation, limited and costly parking)• Requires flexibility• Exchanges can be more problematic for safety and security than supervised visits• Requires flexibility to step up or relax level of supervision, terminate services | <ul style="list-style-type: none">√ Decision to not institute more intrusive changes, such as metal detectors and uniformed guards√ Develop less intrusive measures including<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Two-way radios– Panic buttons– Facilitate victim and children’s arrival and departure, as well as supervised exchanges– Staggered arrival and departure– Sign in and out– Different waiting areas |
|---|--|



SHIFTS IN THINKING		SHIFTS IN PRACTICE	
	SECURITY MEASURES		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Challenge for centers to communicate with one another, within confines of confidentiality requirements, when they have terminated or rejected a case• Consideration for families and communities’ historic experiences with the criminal legal system• Visitation center programs are not looking to demonize the battering parent• “Using the most noninvasive means of safety provisions within a visitation center while still maintaining the safety of the client family and visitation center staff creates an environment that is respectful of every member of the client family utilizing services”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Security cameras– Increase number of staff on-site during visits– Agreement to ensure a priority response by police√ Emphasis on communication√ Ways in which people are welcomed and introduced — “conversational intake” — contributes to overall security√ Interpreters need training about domestic violence in order to recognize when a parent is attempting to engage in battering behaviors√ Consideration of group visitation√ Decision whether or not to terminate visitation services requires safety planning	
	SUSTAINABILITY		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fees from parents cannot (and should not) be a basis of sustaining income for visitation centers• “The most significant shift in the consideration of sustainability has been the identification of the need to look outside of traditional domestic violence funding streams to sustain the visitation centers”• Long-range sustainability requires permanent and earmarked source of revenue for domestic violence- specific supervised visitation and exchange services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">√ Bring supervised visitation into the wider coordinate community response√ Reassure the domestic violence community that the sustainability plan of the centers identifies new funding sources√ Set stage for further discussion of funding<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Use the Safety Audit report (<i>A Discussion of Accounting for Culture in Supervised Visitation Practices</i>) as a way to introduce the Demonstration Initiative and supervised visitation and exchange to agencies and funders that may not have been familiar with them– Presentation to Illinois Department of Human Services√ Provide centers with a needs statement and program description to present a unified approach to funders that reflects the philosophy and goals of the Demonstration Initiative√ Multiple funding sources: city, state, federal, and private foundations	



SNAPSHOT THE CITY OF KENT, WASHINGTON

“ In seeking to include the widest range of community residents, the Kent Demonstration Initiative established a language interpretation component in its work that could fit the circumstances of any language spoken by a family. ”



The City of Kent, Washington

Demonstration Initiative Snapshot

THE COMMUNITY

In January 2001, following the 1998 murder of a mother and child who had been using its services per court order, a visitation center in King County was closed because of security concerns and lack of adequate funding. Through its participation in the Demonstration Initiative, the City of Kent was able to design and open a new center to serve families in the city and South King County. The Safe Havens Visitation Center opened in early 2005.

Kent is a city of approximately 84,000, located in King County, midway between Seattle and Tacoma. It is a fast-growing community whose population doubled between 1990 and 2000. This growth contributed to the county's location of expanded court facilities in Kent and construction of the Regional Justice Center. Thirty percent of the city's population reported a race other than white in the 2000, including African American (8.2%) and Asian (9.4%) among the highest numbers. Almost 22% of the city's census population speaks a language other than English at home. The community includes immigrants from Russia, Ukraine, Somalia, Ethiopia, India, and Mexico. The percentage of families living below the official poverty level is slightly less than the national average, but higher than Seattle and nearly double the rate in King County.

The Kent Supervised Visitation Program Demonstration Initiative grant was administered by the city's Division of Housing and Human Services. Tracee Parker was the local project director, as well as director of the newly established Safe Havens Visitation Center. The Demonstration Initiative involved key community partners among the courts and domestic violence advocacy organizations.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGENCY PARTNERS:

- *Chaya (providing specialized services to South Asian communities in Kent and King County)*
- *YWCA of South King County*
- *CARA (Communities Against Rape and Abuse, providing specialized services to communities of color and people with disabilities)*
- *King County Coalition Against Domestic Violence*
- *Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence*

COURT PARTNER: King County Superior Court

- *Unified Family Court*
- *Family Court Services*





AN ESSENTIAL DISCUSSION

How does a victim of battering who might benefit from supervised visitation find out about it, decide whether or not to use it, communicate that decision to the court, and locate a visitation program?

As part of the Demonstration Initiative, the Kent collaborating partners and the Supervised Visitation Program's national technical assistance partners (Praxis International and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges) conducted a Safety Audit, which got underway seven months after the center opened its doors.²⁴ It had become apparent that battered women were finding their way to the Safe Havens Visitation Center and other visitation providers in rather haphazard ways. The center and its community partners wanted to learn more about how victims of battering learn about supervised visitation as an option for themselves and their children, how they express their concerns to the court, and how they find visitation and exchange services that are organized to recognize and account for battering. They discovered:

- Victims of battering need stronger advocacy and more complete information about legal processes after they have separated from their partners.
 - Victims of battering are confused about who is an “advocate” and what the various practitioners with that title can and cannot do for them.
 - Domestic violence advocates, both community-based and system-based, do not have a systematic way of talking with battered women about options for visitation.
 - Restrictions on the Protection Order Advocate's role in the courtroom can impede a victim of battering in requesting or questioning supervised visitation and other relief or orders.

24. Information on the Praxis Safety and Accountability Audit, and the Demonstration Initiative is available at www.praxisinternational.org.

- Intervening systems – i.e., courts, advocacy, supervised visitation – are disconnected and fragmented in their response and understanding of battering.
 - Interveners are unprepared to talk with a victim of battering about how her children are used as part of battering, and how that affects her safety and well-being, and her children’s safety and well-being.
 - The courts do not share a clear, consistent understanding of supervised visitation in the context of battering, as distinct from supervised visitation in child abuse and neglect cases.
 - Across the courts, there is tension between the priorities of safety for victims of battering and their children, and parental rights to have access to their children.
- Victims of battering hear many messages about “autonomy and self-determination” and “empowerment,” but systems and resources are not adequately set up to promote those values and to structure their practices accordingly.
- Communication processes between the courts and supervised visitation providers have not been well-defined.
- Courtroom security does not fully account for the multiple ways in which a batterer might encounter and threaten or intimidate a victim. Victims may not feel safe to freely express their concerns regarding visitation in such a setting.

The demonstration site partners say that victims of battering in Kent and King County found out about supervised visitation in scattered, haphazard ways, if at all. They were not necessarily connected with the kind of long-term, post-separation advocacy that could help them make critical decisions whether and how supervised visitation or safe exchange would contribute to their and their children’s safety. The Kent inquiry reinforced the importance of linking supervised visitation to a larger practice of post-separation safety and advocacy.

SHIFTS IN THINKING AND PRACTICE

In designing a new center, Kent did not have to undo practices already in place. Nor was it a rushed process, squeezed into a few months. Over an eighteen-month planning period, Kent was able to make use of consultations with other Demonstration Initiative sites and technical assistance partners, multiple training opportunities with researchers and experienced practitioners, and site visits to other centers. “This level of preparation helped us to critically think through lots of difficult issues and set the tone for how we continue to work together at the center.”

Highlights of Kent’s work are presented in the following table, which should not be read as capturing the full breadth and depth of its work within the Demonstration Initiative and the Supervised Visitation Program, or every dimension of change. It focuses on seven areas of exploration and change that were the focus of the larger initiative: meeting the needs of adult and child victims, partnerships with domestic violence advocates, relationships with the courts, cultural accessibility, consulting committees, security measures, and sustainability.

Kent articulated an explicit role for the visitation center as providing services in the context of domestic violence. It defined the following mission and philosophy of service, which are visible in its brochures, welcome packet, and other information provided to those using the center.

MISSION: To provide a safe and accessible, culturally sensitive supervised visitation and exchange program for families affected by intimate partner violence and abuse.

PHILOSOPHY: All services are designed with the objective of increasing safety for victims of domestic violence and decreasing opportunities for further abuse. We adhere to this objective regardless of which parent is designated as the visiting party.

Kent has not shied away from this purpose and has shaped its practices accordingly. In hiring staff and establishing a new program, it put a premium on knowledge and experience related to community response to domestic violence. It sought to strengthen visitation practices overall by encouraging standards and expectations that apply to all professional supervised visitation orders issued in King County, recognizing that the Safe Havens Center could not serve every family where domestic violence specific visitation would be warranted. As a result of this collaboration, an adult victim of battering will find it more likely that a center or individual practitioner will follow key practices that better account for the unique safety considerations in domestic violence cases, regardless of whether a specific referral is made to Safe Havens. The experience of the Demonstration Initiative also contributed to the development of countywide coordinate response guidelines for domestic violence and child maltreatment. The guidelines include considerations for the court in making decisions about supervised visitation in such cases, including factors to use in selecting supervised visitation providers that are knowledgeable about domestic violence and batterers as parents. All aspects of the Kent Safe Havens Visitation Center have been designed to account for domestic violence, from the organization of the physical space to a minimal approach to documentation, emphasis on frequent staff communication about every family using the center, and connections between adult victims and advocacy and other community services.

In seeking to include the widest range of community residents, the Kent Demonstration Initiative established a language interpretation component in its work that could fit the circumstances of any language spoken by a family.

As the Demonstration Initiative concluded, the Kent Safe Havens Visitation Center had been in operation for two years, following a thoughtful, measured period of design and discovery that shaped the center and its mission. Funding for the center was split between a continuing grant under the federal Supervised Visitation Program and support from Kent, King County, and the state. The center's long-range plan for sustainability includes establishing a three-tiered funding structure that splits costs equally between the city, county, and state. Families using the center come from across King County, as well as adjacent counties. At the close of the initiative a more secure funding mechanism had not been established, however, and the center remained in a position of having to bring its work to the attention of individual elected officials at each level of government.



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

NEEDS OF ADULT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THEIR CHILDREN

- Survivors do not always see supervised visitation as helpful to their safety
 - Confused about court orders
 - Arrived with little information about visitation or the center
 - Saw visitation as punitive and the center as an arm of the court
- Visitation practices can have a significant impact victims' safety and well-being
 - For some adult victims, "no access" would be very dangerous
 - For others, a missed appointment means another court action
- Visitation must be factored in as a key aspect of post-separation safety planning
- Awareness of batterers' tenacity and creativity is crucial
 - Ways of using children
 - "Every single thing said or done can become a tool of battering!"
- Establish a standard for all local visitation providers around services to domestic violence survivors and their children

- ✓ "We started from scratch. Everything is new!"
- ✓ Examine ways in which adult victims discover, learn about, and access supervised visitation
- ✓ Safety planning at the center
 - Safety planning specific to visitation center
 - Supervised visitation as aspect of all safety planning
- ✓ Hire staff with solid knowledge of domestic violence, which "created a solid philosophical foundation"
- ✓ "We are still struggling with how services should look for survivors who are noncustodial, visiting parents."
- ✓ Invite community advocates to present education group addressing post-separation advocacy issues

PARTNERSHIPS WITH BATTERED WOMEN'S ADVOCACY PROGRAMS

- "We weren't prepared for how hard it would be to build this relationship."
- Barriers
 - Advocacy unaware of Safe Havens center and what it did
 - Mistrust or defensiveness that visitation was safe for battered women
 - Advocates skeptical that center would understand safety needs of survivors

- ✓ Visitation center staff with advocacy experience bring insight and understanding to making connections with advocates
- ✓ Reach out directly to front-line advocates
 - Bring along to trainings
 - Invite to tour center
- ✓ Pay more direct attention to post-separation advocacy
 - "Shop Talk" presentation on visitation as an aspect of safety planning



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

PARTNERSHIPS WITH BATTERED WOMEN'S ADVOCACY PROGRAMS

- Need to develop relationships with advocates who work directly with battered women
 - Expand connections beyond agency directors
 - Difficult when advocates are chronically overextended
- Need to inform advocates about realities of visitation programs: namely, who, where, and how services can be harmful to battered women

- Carry discussion to local and state levels
- ✓ Bring domestic violence advocates in to conduct in-service training for visitation center staff
- ✓ Include local domestic violence services in planning
- ✓ Create a local group of experts who can provide ongoing support and training on issues related to visitation and domestic violence

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE COURTS

- “The biggest single eye-opener was recognizing that there is no consistency in how the court determines whether a batterer should have professional supervised visitation.”
- Could not assume that courts recognized the distinction between the center's focus on safety in the context of domestic violence and other sources of supervised visitation (e.g., private practitioners, family members)
 - Address courts' assumption that Safe Havens was avenue for low-income families rather than emphasis on how it addressed safety
 - Recognize impact of frequent rotations of judges and commissioners
 - Educate court personnel (judges, commissioners, and social workers) as to how battering continues in visitation, even when supervised
 - Increase courts' awareness that there are no standards, regulations, certification, or monitoring processes in Washington State required of professional visitation providers; anyone can do it

- ✓ Shared training and opportunities for dialogue are essential
- ✓ Regular meetings and contact between the center and court personnel are essential
- ✓ Develop a Safe Havens specific order
 - Clear message that it is domestic violence specific
 - Defines services as providing safety in and around center before, during and after visits
 - Statement that center will not provide parenting assessments or custody/visitation recommendations
- ✓ Develop county-wide visitation order that frames standards for professional visitation and exchange that better account for domestic violence, regardless of a specific Safe Havens referral
- ✓ Courts do not have any system for tracking visitation orders and most survivors do not want to return to court unless absolutely necessary
 - Figure out the center's role in notifying the court when batterer stops coming, services terminated, or there's been a serious safety violation



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE COURTS

- ✓ Develop relationships with family court case managers in order to better support and communicate to the court rejection or termination of cases because of safety

CULTURAL ACCESSIBILITY

- “We knew it would be hard work, and it is! If anything, we’ve come to realize it’s even harder than we expected.”
 - Common immigrant experience between center staff and families can add greatly to trust and rapport, regardless of whether they share a country of origin
 - Including advocacy partners from more diverse communities in the initial grant application would have encouraged curiosity and participation before opening the center
 - Recognize demands on culturally specific advocacy services and identify ways to include their voices on a regular basis
 - Go to culturally specific advocacy services and attend events that might be of interest to them, rather than rely on connections being made via visitation sponsored meetings or events
 - Acknowledge that our model of supervised visitation is not appropriate for everyone; where can we be flexible and where is consistency essential?
- ✓ Establish an interpreter program to include speakers in any language requested
 - Screening and personal recommendations
 - Clearly explain center’s expectations and role as interpreter only
 - Microphone and headset system in order to be less invasive
 - ✓ Add bicultural, bilingual staff to make families more at ease
 - ✓ Increase diversity of staff to increase diversity of people served
 - ✓ Training by and for culturally specific agencies that have a domestic violence service component
 - ✓ Train center staff on how to work with interpreters
 - ✓ Set priorities for translating center materials, e.g., informational brochures, welcome packet, service agreement

CONSULTING COMMITTEES

- Start with members who have more than a basic knowledge of domestic violence issues or it is difficult to get to supervised visitation issues
 - Define roles and expectations
 - Increase diversity among committee members
- ✓ Choose members for specific skills, expertise, and potential to influence key partners
 - ✓ Consulting committees need to reflect different needs at planning versus implementation stages
 - ✓ Consulting committee members serve as links to larger community



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

CONSULTING COMMITTEES

- Committee members are essential in addressing the larger issues revealed at the center; they have a key role in leading social change efforts

SECURITY MEASURES

- Let go of the idea of having an off-duty police officer present and “determined that good screening and clear expectations would be more effective”
- Turning a case away as “too dangerous” is a stand a center needs to take
- Clear message that center addresses domestic violence related cases
- “We want to have in place policies that take into consideration the needs of individual families. This means an ability to remain flexible and adjust protocol as needed.”

- ✓ No reliance on a security officer on site
- ✓ Build police understanding of visitation center and its security needs
- ✓ Build relationships with center’s immediate neighbors
- ✓ Cannot establish security policies and procedures without an actual physical location
- ✓ “No surprises,” meaning that anything written in a case file should not come as a surprise to a batterer
- ✓ Design with security in mind: separate parking; cameras; overhead sound monitors in visitation area; 911 panic buttons; wireless alert light; one-way window into visitation area; key pad locking systems
- ✓ Allow two hours for initial meeting with each parent
- ✓ Training on batterer intervention and child development to help staff redirect in way that do not come off as a challenge or threat

SUSTAINABILITY

- “At this point we are still on very shaky ground.”
- Requires multiple sources and relationships, public and private
- Need to infuse the community with the notion of supervised visitation as part of the coordinated community response

- ✓ Emphasis on supervised visitation as an extension of services for victims of battering
- ✓ Invite legislators, policy-makers, and funders to the center for personal tours and public events
- ✓ Utilize education interns and AmeriCorps volunteers







**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON
THE DEMONSTRATION INITIATIVE
VISIT...**

PRAXISINTERNATIONAL.ORG