

SHIFTING SECURITY

“ *The demonstration site centers questioned whether guards and metal detectors might encourage a false sense of security and diminish attention to what victims of battering were actually saying about their safety.* ”

Shifting Security

The Demonstration Initiative centers moved away from security characterized by the presence and visibility of security guards and metal detectors to a practice of security that emphasizes building relationships, understanding individual safety needs, and the ready availability of less intrusive technology. This occurred by building an approach to security around all of these components, not an isolated act of removing a guard or a scanner.

- **Security via relationships** – A batterer might arrive at supervised visitation outwardly hostile or outwardly calm. He might be resentful and angry about having to spend time with his children under the confines of the center. He might be good-humored, friendly, and pleasant to talk with. He might have successfully shifted custody to himself and come through the door as a custodial parent. He might have begun to examine the harm he has caused or resist all opportunities for self-reflection and change. He may welcome the time he spends with his children, however short, and attempt to make their time together as meaningful as possible, or insistently complain that it is too short. He may have started to accept the separation and be less focused on his former partner; or, be even more obsessed and jealous than he has ever been. The Demonstration Initiative came to recognize that one of the ways to build safety for adult victims and their children was to create respectful, non-colluding relationships with batterers that

help minimize their feelings of anxiety, resentment, anger, frustration, and nervousness. There is no one-size-fits-all approach that works with everyone. Building respectful, non-colluding relationships with batterers is more than being nice and offering a cup of coffee. It requires treating them in a respectful, humanizing way while also being prepared to intervene when they are creating risk. It also requires a strong, united visitation center with staff that is well prepared to communicate with batterers and support consistent and clear boundaries.

- **Security via recognizing individual needs** – Not every victim of battering needs protection in the same way. Security, the demonstration sites came to recognize, rested on their emerging understanding of safety over time (“2-2-20”), and the fluid, changing nature of safety. Who is at risk from whom, and in what ways? Who needs to be walked to her car or to a bus stop? Who needs an emergency cell phone? Who needs two staff in the room at all times? Who needs to be called and warned if a visiting parent has arrived too early or too late? Who is receiving hang-up calls or finding her ex-husband parked outside her apartment? Who is violating a protection order? Who has a final divorce hearing scheduled? Who has attempted or succeeded in abducting the children? Who is staying in an emergency shelter?
- **Security via technology** – The demonstration sites did not forego other technologies in moving away from metal detectors, but emphasized less intrusive tools. These included panic buttons for staff, improved lighting around parking lots and doorways, cameras at entrances and parking lots that were not readily within view, a “blue light” that a staff member can trip to signal others for assistance, overhead speakers, and cell phones for victims of battering (to communicate concerns about a parent’s arrival or departure), automatic closing and locking doors, automatic door releases, a call button outside the facility to alert staff, two-way radios, and safer parking lot design. Whatever is in place, a battered woman coming to the center needs to know what is available, under what circumstances it would be used, and how it meets her needs.





One center director described their reconsideration of security in this way: “We made a deliberative decision not to have guards, metal detectors, wands; we had conversations about what those things meant to the centers. One thing was that they did not believe that those things create a safe environment. The perception was that if we had all of this higher security the court would think we could handle more dangerous situations and we didn’t want to set up that scenario. It’s also sustainability issue: if we lost funds, we wouldn’t want to have to take security away, given what people would be used to at that point.”

The demonstration site centers questioned whether guards and metal detectors might encourage a false sense of security and diminish attention to what victims of battering were actually saying about their safety. If a batterer was intent on coming to a center and killing his partner, a metal detector would be unlikely to prevent him from carrying out his plan and the presence of an armed guard could mean a shootout in the center.

Another element in the centers’ deliberations around security was the need to pay attention to people’s experiences with the courts, police, and other institutions intervening in their lives and their community’s experience with deep-rooted oppressions, such as racism. If parents were already under a high degree of scrutiny in their everyday lives and routines, they wanted to minimize that experience in the center, while acknowledging and addressing the overall safety of adult victims and children, and the specific dangers that individual batterers might present.



STRATEGIES...

TAKING A CRITICAL LOOK AT SECURITY

- ✓ Account for the fluid, changing safety needs of battered women and their children
- ✓ Talk with adult victims about their needs; establish ways to have on-going conversations about safety and security
- ✓ Know the community and the people who use the center; understand the impact and meaning of each security feature for different communities
- ✓ Consider the least intrusive methods of supporting safety for each family
- ✓ Build respectful relationships in ways that promote communication, identify ongoing safety needs, and reduce batterer hostility and aggression
- ✓ Expand the understanding of security to include:
 - What makes each abused parent and child feel safe
 - Whether the center can realistically take the precautions needed
 - Court orders that restrict one parent's interaction with another
 - Cultural, social, or environmental factors that increase or decrease safety
- ✓ Forbid service of court papers (e.g., personal protection order, warrants) at visitation centers
- ✓ Recommend periodic reviews or other hearings in some cases to monitor risk and compliance with court orders
- ✓ Discourage practice of "log books" where parents write notes to one another
- ✓ Maintain separate files for each parent and child



CHILDREN'S SAFETY

“ *Children who live with battering come through the doors of a visitation center with complex, intertwined feelings of fear, anger, disinterest, and love.* ”

Children's Safety

The Demonstration Initiative focused largely on changing practices around a center's relationships and interactions with adults, which was not unexpected given visitation's historical orientation towards children's safety and the invisibility of adult victims of battering. "There wasn't a great shift in our thinking around children because the practices were already in place for the kids," was one summation. On closer look, however, that statement was not entirely accurate. When relationships with children were considered in the context of battering, the demonstration sites raised a new set of questions and took a closer look at their thinking about children, particularly in the context of equal regard for children and their abused parent.

Children who live with battering come through the doors of a visitation center with complex, intertwined feelings of fear, anger, disinterest, and love. They may not want to be anywhere near their father, or they may be eager to see him and blame their mother for their separation from him. If they are visiting a mother who has lost custody, they may be intensely angry at her or grieving and confused about why she has been taken from them, or they have been taken from her. They may be annoyed that their routines with friends, sports, and after-school activities are interrupted by visitation. They may be afraid for their mother or angry at her or both. They may have many conflicting feelings about what has happened in their lives and what this new routine known as visitation or exchange will demand of them.

The Demonstration Initiative put new emphasis on the importance of asking children what they need to feel safe, what they would like to have happen during the visit, and what they don't want to have happen during the visit, recognizing that children within the same family may have different needs depending on their age and past relationship with their visiting parent.

The demonstration sites recognized that if they were to pay equal regard to the safety of adult victims of battering and their children, and contribute to safety beyond the immediate hours of a visit or exchange, a safety code word was not enough. They would need to pay attention to how children can be used by batterers, particularly as tactics of coercion and control shift in the period after separation, and how that can affect a child's response to visitation and exchange. They would need to be more intentional in how children were welcomed and introduced to the visitation center, and prepared to acknowledge and explain why children were there, and respond to their questions. They would need to be prepared to talk with children who may have last seen their father being taken away by police after assaulting their mother or the morning they left for the shelter. They would not only need to acknowledge this experience and their father's absence, but help children prepare for a parent's changed physical appearance if several months or years have passed. They would need to know more about how battered women lose custody of their children and how that can affect children, who may have tried to protect their mother. They would need to pay attention to thorny questions of confidentiality when children share something with the request of "don't tell Mom" or "don't tell Dad."

Overall, the Demonstration Initiative recognized that addressing children's safety meant supporting children's resiliency and strengths in ways that support development of a future safe relationship with their father, without jeopardizing their own or their mother's safety and wellbeing, or their relationship with their mother.



STRATEGIES...

SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S SAFETY IN THE CONTEXT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- ✓ Understand and maintain an on-going discussion about the ways in which children's safety and well-being is linked to their mother's safety and well-being
- ✓ Recognize that children may want and need to maintain a relationship with their father, regardless of the violence and abuse they and their mother have lived with
- ✓ Develop a relationship, establish trust, and have on-going conversations with each child using the center
- ✓ Listen to children and allow them to be heard without judgments
- ✓ Remain focused on how children define their own needs; don't make assumptions
- ✓ Learn what would best contribute to a child's sense of physical and emotional safety
- ✓ Help children establish safe and respectful on-going relationships with their father, mother, and siblings
- ✓ Establish meaningful links with advocacy and support within the community
- ✓ Create structure, limits, and predictability around visitation services
- ✓ Provide frequent training to staff on child development, including cross-cultural aspects and specific considerations in the context of domestic violence
- ✓ Engage the courts and law enforcement agencies to create child-friendly policies and protocols regarding children who refuse to visit

A SPECTRUM OF SERVICES

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A Spectrum of Services

The Demonstration Initiative helped recognize and articulate a visitation center's distinct position in helping craft safety for victims of battering and their children. Visitation centers have a relationship with each family member and often maintain that connection over a period of weeks or, in some situations, years. A visitation center is in a unique position to reduce a batterer's opportunity to do further harm, by providing a certain space and framework for interaction, and provide a setting through which he can begin to repair the harm his abuse has caused.

Visitation centers have always been about safety for children. The demonstration sites and broader program discussions introduced safety of adult victims and repairing the harm caused by battering as equally legitimate goals of supervised visitation. Visitation centers could want people to change and could provide the atmosphere and environment for that to happen. Visitation services could cross a spectrum of services, from providing a safe place for children to visit a parent to helping members of a family shift to new structures of parenting that account for the impact of battering. Visitation programs could reject a single, one-size-fits-all definition of supervised visitation. They could both distinguish and explore the intersections of domestic violence related visitation from that oriented toward parental abuse and neglect of children. They could provide more traditional time-focused, highly monitored access-oriented visits, with one monitor to one family,

or provide different forms of group visits or degrees of supervision as a family transitioned to exchanges or unsupervised visits. A single visitation center might utilize all of these approaches as it tailored its services to the unique needs of individual families.

Visitation centers could offer a spectrum of services that reflected local conditions and resources. The policing role could shift to more of a social service role. Centers could shape themselves differently as they made the safety of adult victims visible and accounted for families' unique needs. They could reconsider their organization and practices around everything from the use of wands and metal detectors to the center's location (e.g., community-based site versus a legal facility such as court house), staff roles during a visit or exchange, group visits, documentation, communication with parents, and battered women as visiting parents.

Above all, supervised visitation services that account for battering need not fit a single model, but will reflect the distinctiveness and diversity of each community, under a framework of guiding principles.



ESSENTIAL DISCUSSIONS

...any visitation and exchange program that seeks to account for battering and pay equal regard to safety must attend to these questions of defining its role, accounting for culture, building safety, and discovery of and access to its services.

As part of its role in the Demonstration Initiative, each site defined and shaped a question it wanted to explore, using the framework of the Safety Audit as the method of inquiry. Their questions and discoveries contributed greatly to the shifts in thinking and practice that have come to characterize the Supervised Visitation Program. From the vantage point of 2007, the questions taken together provide a set of essential discussions

in thinking about how to provide safe ways for a battering parent to visit children without further harm to children or to an adult victim. In other words, any visitation and exchange program that seeks to account for battering and pay equal regard to safety must attend to these questions of defining its role, accounting for culture, building safety, and discovery of and access to its services.

Each question is summarized in more detail in the site-specific chapters of this monograph. They include:

- [1] What is the role of a supervised visitation center? (Michigan)
- [2] How does culture play a role in serving families using supervised visitation? (Chicago)
- [3] How does the work of a visitation center produce or not produce safety for everyone involved? (Santa Clara County)
- [4] How does a victim of battering who might benefit from supervised visitation find out about it, decide whether or not to use it, effectively communicate that decision to the court, and locate an appropriate visitation program? (Kent)

The questions and resulting discoveries are intertwined. It is impossible to talk about the role of supervised visitation without talking about safety, and vice versa; or, to talk about role and safety without accounting for people's unique needs, cultures, and identities. Whether and how a victim of battering discovers supervised visitation or exchange, evaluates its potential for improving her and her children's safety, and has access to it requires all of the above, as well as collaboration across visitation programs, advocates, courts, and other community interveners.

SUMMING UP

We know supervised visitation that pays equal regard should not look like this, but we're not entirely certain of what it should look like.

The discussions and changes generated out of the Supervised Visitation Program Demonstration Initiative came through lively debate and often a fair measure of disagreement within and across the participating communities and visitation centers. The shifts in philosophy and practice described in this monograph were forged out of that energy and insight. It was central to the Demonstration Initiative's work together across the sites, as well as within each local project, to develop a unifying vision and common philosophy. The new ground opened through this process – reconfiguring supervised visitation to account for battering – continues to present questions, doubts, and surprises. In concluding their collective work, the demonstration sites were able to say, “We know supervised visitation that pays equal regard should not look like this, but we're not entirely certain of what it should look like.” Documentation is one example of this puzzle. Working with batterers and responding to children who are reluctant to participate in a visit or exchange are other pieces.

Supervised visitation and exchange services in the United States look and function differently as a result of the work of the Demonstration Initiative and the contributions of its grantees to the Supervised Visitation Program. The Initiative supported eleven centers in four states to step back and have the kinds of debates and discussions that produced the shifts in thinking and practice described in this report. Whether participating in the Supervised Visitation Program or not, visitation services across the country have been introduced to the principles and practices anchored in equal regard for safety of children and adult victims of battering. The Initiative partners sparked an on-going exploration of the level of engagement between a visitation center and the families using its services. They challenged the “fly-on-the-wall” type of surveillance that characterized the prevailing approach to supervised visitation and encouraged centers to engage with every member of a family in an intentional way.

As the Demonstration Initiative partners in Michigan, Chicago, Santa Clara County, and Kent summed up their work together and identified key shifts in thinking and practice, they also considered what was missing in the overall approach, as well as the primary areas of ongoing work.

What was missing? Looking back, the demonstration sites would have brought other community partners into the initiative earlier on in their work together. Stronger, more equally balanced participation by battered women's advocates should have been built into the process and design of the Initiative from the beginning. For some sites, drawing batterer intervention programs and judges into the projects earlier on would also have been helpful.

What is ahead? The ongoing work proceeds in part from the key areas of change and addresses obstacles encountered along the way. It includes, but is not limited to:

- Keeping the focus on equal regard for the safety of children *and* adult victims of battering.
- Challenging the assumption of neutrality as a framework for supervised visitation and questioning its impact on the safety of adult victims of battering.
- Infusing changes in philosophy and practice throughout the organization and wider community response. "It has to all connect; we can't just have the DV 101 piece, but have to connect it to center practices. What does that knowledge of domestic violence mean when you're doing a visit, conducting an orientation, going to court?" Within participating centers, change was influenced by who participated in Demonstration Initiative discussions and events, as well as staff turnover. The challenge is to apply that knowledge in a way that any staff person is able to understand and act on it.
- Addressing visitation centers' fears in responding to battering, from fears of interacting with batterers to making decisions that cause further harm to children.
- Extending beyond agency administrators to draw front-line workers more completely into the process of change. "If you invited advocates and (visitation) monitors to the table that would help build the relationships. It needs to be peer-to-peer across levels."
- Arriving at common definition of post-separation advocacy and clarity of roles between advocates and visitation centers.
- Linking battered women with advocacy that fits their needs during and after separation from a battering partner.
- Giving equal weight and attention to supervised visitation and supervised exchanges.
- Defining and articulating safety-orientated transition processes from supervised visitation to supervised exchange to unsupervised access.
- Building connections with batterer intervention programs and strengthening their understanding of supervised visitation as an element of building safety for victims of battering.
- Figuring out how to best respond to children who are reluctant or afraid to participate in visitation or exchange.
- Addressing the range of issues associated with refusing or terminating cases that a center sees as too dangerous. The demonstration sites often referred to these as the "gut feeling" cases, while recognizing that there needed to be a more grounded way of recognizing them, and the response needed to go beyond the center to the wider community response.

- Addressing the under-representation of people of color receiving visitation services.
- Establishing a sustainable base of funding and resources to support visitation services that meet the goals of the Demonstration Initiative. Many centers experienced complete turnover in directors and staff over the course of the Initiative. They struggled to retain skilled staff and to maintain consistency of services in the face of such high turnover and loss of expertise.



The Demonstration Initiative provides a map for designing supervised visitation and safe exchange that pays equal regard to safety for children and adult victims, accounts for the impact of battering in people's lives, contributes to building safety over time, reduces a batterer's opportunity and inclination to harm, and contributes to a broader process of community change. The experience of the Demonstration Initiative provides a guide for changing how visitation services link with parents, the courts, and community-based advocacy and batterer intervention programs. It provides strategies for redesigning administrative practices around court referrals and parents' introductions to and contacts with the centers. It suggests content and focus for training center staff and collaborating partners, both to introduce new administrative practices and to strengthen knowledge of battering and its implications for supervised visitation and exchange. It provides a guide for continuing the challenge of reframing the mission and purpose of supervised visitation and safe exchange.

DEMONSTRATION INITIATIVE SNAPSHOTS

...shifts in thinking

...shifts in practice

The following series of individual project snapshots provides an overview of each site's participation in the Supervised Visitation Program's Demonstration Initiative and the shifts in thinking and practice that resulted from its work. While it reflects key areas of change, this brief summary does not do justice to the dynamic, spirited undertaking that questioned every aspect of supervised visitation from the standpoint of its impact on protection and safety for victims of battering and their children.

Each snapshot includes an overview of the community and key partners involved in the local initiative, an overview of the discussion pursued in its Safety Audit, and a review of shifts in thinking and practices as a result of the site's involvement in the Demonstration Initiative.

The snapshot reviews seven areas of exploration and change that were the focus of the larger initiative:

- [1] Meeting the needs of adult and child victims
- [2] Partnerships with domestic violence advocates
- [3] Relationships with the courts
- [4] Cultural accessibility
- [5] Consulting committees
- [6] Security measures and
- [7] Sustainability

This account should not be read as capturing the full breadth and depth of each site's work or every dimension of change within the demonstration project and the Supervised Visitation Program. The heading "shifts in thinking" presents key concepts and ideas that the local initiative identified as most essential to designing supervised visitation services that protect victims of domestic violence. "Shifts in practice" addresses the ways in which the centers and their community partners began to act on the new understanding of supervised visitation and safe exchange that emerged from their work together. The distinction between shifts in thinking and practices was not always precise, as reflected in this summary, nor was the change in one direction only. The two columns do not reflect a cause-effect relationship between each point listed, but should be read together with an understanding that changes in practice affected thinking and changes in thinking affected practice. While not every change was fully realized, together the list of recommended practices provides a blueprint for ongoing development of visitation and exchange services in each Demonstration Initiative community and beyond.



SNAPSHOT

THE STATE OF MICHIGAN

“ *The Michigan Demonstration Initiative brought forward a new understanding of the role of supervised visitation services in building safety for children and adult victims over time.* ”



The State of Michigan

Demonstration Initiative Snapshot

THE COMMUNITIES

The Michigan demonstration site included four visitation centers in communities across the state. Three of the centers had been in operation prior to the Demonstration Initiative and one was established under the grant. Michigan was able to explore how to design a new center that accounts for domestic violence, as well as how to change practices within an existing program. It was also able to compare practices between the two centers that were part of larger domestic violence services organizations and two that were located within human service agencies with a child welfare orientation.

CHILD AND PARENT CENTER: JACKSON COUNTY – The center is a program of the Council for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect. It serves a population of just over 158,000 in the south central part of the state.¹⁶ Jackson County is predominantly White (89%). County-wide the African American population is 8%; in the city of Jackson it is 20%. The county has a small immigrant population (1.7%) and 4.4% of the population reports speaking a language other than English at home. The center has been providing supervised visitation services since 1998, with an emphasis on reunification of foster care children with their biological parents.

LOCAL PROJECT COORDINATOR:

Betty Wright; succeeded by Renee Ingraham and Sarah Weber¹⁷

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGENCY PARTNER: *Aware, Inc.*

COURT PARTNER: *4th Circuit Court, Jackson County*

16. Population figures included in the Demonstration Initiative snapshots are drawn from the 2000 Census.

17. All of the Michigan visitation centers have experienced significant staff turnover since 2002, including the local project coordinators for the Demonstration Initiative, who are listed in chronological order.

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES OF NORTHWEST

MICHIGAN: GRAND TRAVERSE, ANTRIM, AND

LEELANAU COUNTIES – Child and Family

Services provides a range of services related to foster care, adoption, child abuse, and mental health counseling. It has a long history of providing supervised visitation services for children in foster care. Under its participation in the Demonstration Initiative, it expanded services to domestic relations cases (e.g., divorce, paternity) involving domestic violence. The center provides supervised visitation and safe exchange to three rural counties in northwest Michigan. The counties have a combined population of 122,000 which is predominantly White (range of 93% to 97%). The range for Native American populations is 1% to 4%; Hispanic, 1% to 3%; and, less than .5% African American across the three counties. No more than 2% of the population is comprised of immigrants, with between 3% and 6% speaking a language other than English at home.

LOCAL PROJECT COORDINATOR:

April Ayers; succeeded by Mary Lou Williams

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGENCY PARTNER:

Women's Resource Center – Grand Traverse Area

COURT PARTNER: 13th Circuit Court; Antrim,

Grand Traverse, and Leelanau Counties

EVERY WOMAN'S PLACE: MUSKEGON COUNTY

– Muskegon County, located on the western edge of the state bordering Lake Michigan, has a population of 170,200 which is 81% White, 14% African American, and 3.5% Hispanic. The reported immigrant population is 2% and 4.4% of the county's population speaks a language other than English at home. Every Woman's Place is a domestic violence services agency that established visitation services for the first time as part of its participation in the Michigan Demonstration Initiative.

LOCAL PROJECT COORDINATOR:

Barbara Olsen; succeeded by Crystal France

COURT PARTNER: 14th Circuit Court,

Muskegon County

HAVEN: OAKLAND COUNTY – HAVEN provides

visitation services to Oakland County, north of Detroit. The county (population 1,194,156) is 2.5% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 10% African American, and 83% White. In comparison to the other sites, Oakland County has larger populations of residents who speak a language other than English at home (13%) and who are immigrants (10%). HAVEN is a domestic violence agency that has been providing supervised visitation and safe exchange services since 1992.

LOCAL PROJECT COORDINATOR:

Tiffany Martinez; succeeded by Katalin Berdy

COURT PARTNER: 6th Circuit Court,

Oakland County



The Michigan Supervised Visitation Program Demonstration Initiative grant was administered by the state Department of Human Services and the Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board (MDVPTB). The Demonstration Initiative Project Director was Shelia Hankins (MDVPTB). State-level partners included the State Court Administrative Office and the Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. The Michigan Demonstration Initiative also involved key partners among the courts and domestic violence advocacy organizations in each participating community.

AN ESSENTIAL DISCUSSION

What is the role of a supervised visitation center?

The four visitation programs participating in the Michigan Demonstration Initiative, along with Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence and the Supervised Visitation Program's national technical assistance partners (Praxis International and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges), together conducted a Safety Audit that examined the role of a supervised visitation center in domestic relations cases involving domestic violence, and related sexual assault, stalking, and child abuse and neglect.¹⁸

They made the following discoveries:

- The connection between the domestic violence that had occurred or was occurring and the work of the center was unclear
- Beyond the visit itself, the center's safety objectives were ambiguous
- Beyond ensuring children's safety during visits, the centers struggled with their role in providing services and supports in the context of family members' competing interests
- The center's role and relationship to the courts was unclear
- Each of the four centers had a degree of disconnection between the experiences of battered parents and their children and the concepts guiding the center's work with these families
- No organization in the four communities took on the role of coordinating inter-agency thinking and action to collectively ensure safety for victims of abuse in supervised visitation and exchange cases

¹⁸. Information on the Praxis Safety and Accountability Audit, and the Demonstration Initiative is available at www.praxisinternational.org.

One of the key outcomes of this work in Michigan was recognition of the role that supervised visitation and safe exchange plays beyond the two hours of the immediate visit or exchange. Having a safe visit or exchange is undeniably critical and important to everyone involved. However, events at the center also impact each family member over the two years or so spanning the period from immediate to permanent separation as divorce, custody, and visitation issues are being resolved. Moreover, events at the center affect safety over the long period from childhood to adulthood over which victims of battering must navigate parenting around their former partner, regardless of the severity of the abuse they experienced. The relationships a center builds with family members, the tone it sets, and its role in the wider community response to ending violence contribute to safety over this twenty year span, regardless of whether it is part of a specific family's life for six months or several years.

SHIFTS IN THINKING AND PRACTICE

The Michigan Demonstration Initiative brought forward a new understanding of the role of supervised visitation services in building safety for children and adult victims over time. It is in the process of finalizing detailed practice recommendations for supervised visitation programs that recognize and account for domestic violence across all aspects of their work: Recommended Practices for Supervised Visitation in Domestic Relations Cases Where the Noncustodial Parent is a Perpetrator of Domestic Abuse (compiled by Mary M. Lovik, J.D., for eventual adoption by the Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board).

Michigan's practice recommendations are intended for use by prospective or established supervised visitation services, judicial decision makers and related staff, professionals in allied agencies such as domestic violence advocacy and batterer intervention services. It sets a framework for understanding coercive and controlling tactics of abuse after separation and during the period of supervised visitation; defines the roles of court, advocacy, and other community partners; and, presents practice recommendations for judicial decision-making around custody and visitation, including transitions from supervised visitation to less restricted access. Its recommended practices encompass: safety measures for supervised visitation; developing policies and rules for visits; intervening, terminating, and suspending visits; confidentiality and disclosure issues in information management; establishing procedures for screening, referrals, orientation, and visits.

SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

NEEDS OF ADULT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THEIR CHILDREN

- Defining a center's mission as "safety of the child" leaves out safety for adult victims
- Establish core beliefs in order to develop standards of practice for supervised visitation that accounts for battering and other forms of domestic violence
- Distinguish domestic abuse from other forms of violence between intimate partners or other family members that do not involve coercive control
- Terms such as "custodial" and "noncustodial" can be inadequate to identify which parent is a victim of domestic violence
- Define "safety" in the context of what it looks like and feels like to each adult victim
- Safe supervised visitation must account for potential lethality, overall danger, and coercive and controlling tactics in the context of parenting
- No single approach to building resiliency will work for every child and adult victim; experiences vary greatly and visitation must stay flexible
- Supporting an abused parent's safety is one of the best protective factors for children
- Safety needs supersede parenting rights
- Build consideration of safety into documentation practices
- Establish a coordinated community response to risk assessment must be grounded in a coordinated community response
- Safety screening at the center should be for the limited purpose of determining whether the parents and children can safely use the center's services; and, determining measures necessary to mitigate

- ✓ Articulate core beliefs: 1) parenting time must be physically and emotionally safe and respectful for parents and children; 2) helping agencies should be accountable for intervening to safeguard abused parents and their children, and hold perpetrators accountable for their behavior
- ✓ Developed statewide recommended practices
- ✓ Make the mission of safety for adult and child victims explicit
- ✓ Revise documentation formats to account for the violence (i.e., make the abuse contributing to the referral visible)
- ✓ Establish procedures for record keeping that safeguard individual identifying information for victims
- ✓ Only the abusive parent should be charged a fee
- ✓ Proactively address survivors who are noncustodial parents
- ✓ Conduct a follow-up conversation with each parent after a visit
- ✓ Provide exercise or reading room and resource library for waiting parents
- ✓ Craft guidelines that define domestic violence, describe characteristics of coercion and control, distinguish it from other behaviors, and address common misconceptions
- ✓ Emphasize wide range of actions and tactics beyond physical assault
- ✓ Reject the discredited "parental alienation syndrome"
- ✓ Craft guidelines with specific examples of coercive and controlling tactics during supervised visitation
- ✓ Provide specific and varied examples of building resiliency for children

SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

NEEDS OF ADULT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THEIR CHILDREN

- ✓ Articulate specific techniques for creating a supportive environment for child and adult victims
- ✓ Provide guidelines for talking with parents about informed consent in a meaningful way
- ✓ Discourage a blanket approach to release of information
- ✓ Define safety precautions to take before disclosing information, such as reviewing the information with the abused parent and allowing time to plan for safety and adverse consequences
- ✓ Discourage internal staff communication logs because of consequences in disclosing information everyone mentioned, including a specific individual, if subpoenaed

PARTNERSHIPS WITH BATTERED WOMEN'S ADVOCACY PROGRAM

- Cannot assume a single kind of link between visitation centers and advocacy programs works statewide
 - Locating visitation services and domestic violence advocacy services within the same organization does not automatically lead to a strong link and partnership
 - Advocates are uniquely positioned to assist abused parents, including protecting communications from disclosure
- ✓ Build links via cross training
 - ✓ Include advocacy partners in monthly Demonstration Initiative site calls to help strengthen partnership
 - ✓ Make referrals from supervised visitation to advocacy program
 - ✓ Encourage centers and advocacy programs to join Michigan Supervised Visitation Network (which has been associated with the Michigan Safe Havens: Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange sites)
 - ✓ Explore ways for advocates to make connections, be available to victims, and explain services while they are waiting in the center
 - ✓ Expand avenues for victims using supervised visitation to meet with advocates at the center, e.g., advocate located at center, on-call, in conjunction with orientation

SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

PARTNERSHIPS WITH BATTERED WOMEN'S ADVOCACY PROGRAM

- ✓ Establish precautions around safety and access to information when a center is housed under a domestic violence services agency

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE COURTS

- Establish what information will be reported between the center and referring court before center accepts referrals
- Duty to report to the court limits a center's ability to keep information confidential and risks abuser access to sensitive information
- Family court decision makers must pay particular attention to risks related to joint custody and parenting time in cases involving domestic abuse
- Court has the primary responsibility for assessment risk in domestic violence cases, with support from wider coordinated community response
- Relationship between center and court should support a center's judgment if it cannot safely serve a family and not result in an order for parenting time under less secure circumstances

- ✓ Involve local judges in planning training (statewide and local)
- ✓ Provide guidance and specific examples for understanding how joint custody (physical and/or legal) may be contrary to the best interests of the child in cases involving domestic abuse
- ✓ Define role of judicial decision makers, including: promoting safety for children and abused parents; producing orders that minimize opportunities for continued abuse and that maximize protection of abused parents and children; establishing case management practices that minimize opportunities to use court proceedings as a vehicle of ongoing abuse.
- ✓ Provide tools to help judicial decision makers assess parenting time arrangements and deny, order, or suspend protective conditions
- ✓ "Transitions from supervised to unsupervised visitation should be made gradually, to allow the court to monitor for safety and to give the child and abused parent time to adjust"
- ✓ Provide guidelines on optimizing the protections supervised visitation offers, e.g., craft orders with enough specificity to make them difficult to manipulate and enough flexibility to allow the center to accommodate them; avoid orders with automatic transitions to unsupervised parenting time
- ✓ "Every report to the referring court should begin by reminding the court of the safety concern at issue for the family, and the limited context in which the visits occur"

SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

CULTURAL ACCESSIBILITY

- To carry out its mission, a center must be a place where people of diverse cultures and identities feel welcome, understood, and secure: a “cultural safe haven”
- A community seeking to establish a supervised visitation center must first establish a coordinated effort that reflects the diversity of the population it hopes to serve
- Outreach must include direct involvement of members of diverse communities in crafting policies and practices, providing services, and governing the center
- Communities of color have been underrepresented in supervised visitation services
- A center must identify and understand cultural differences that can be a source of conflict between parents or be used as a tactic of control and coercion
- Need to understand how a center and other institutions families interact with have operated as sources of empowerment or oppression

- ✓ Use staff meetings, focus groups, questionnaires, and ad hoc work groups to examine the center’s design and implied and explicit messages about who is welcome
- ✓ Examine how staff members’ own cultural beliefs and practices might affect their work with diverse clients
- ✓ “Staff members must be grounded in the belief that ‘culture’ is never a justification for violence or other forms of oppression”
- ✓ Safety planning should include possibility that cultural beliefs, practices, and expectations might be used as tactics of abuse

CONSULTING COMMITTEES

- Fulfilling its core mission means that a visitation center must provide leadership in ongoing development of safe, accessible services
- Broader community collaboration must look at challenges battered women face after separation (e.g., ongoing coercion, threats, a father’s re-entry after prison) and how they connect with visitation and parental access to children
- Supervised visitation that accounts for domestic violence begins with on-going community forum in which intervening service agencies coordinate efforts and pool resources

- ✓ Integrate supervised visitation into wider coordinated community response
- ✓ Define recommended roles for each key participant
- ✓ Define tasks, including:
 - Establish and coordinate day-to-day links between intervening services under a domestic violence services agency
 - Build referral networks to meet needs of family members using supervised visitation
 - Reflect diversity of community and act as point of referral and expand services accordingly

SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

CONSULTING COMMITTEES

- Require a “job description” and active participation
- Batterer intervention programs must be present and involved from beginning, but chosen with care as some fall short of creating an environment that fosters capacity and willingness to change
- Coordinated community response needs to come to agreement on purpose of risk assessment, which system will conduct it, and how it will be conducted
- “Supervised visitation centers and courts must work together within the local coordinated community effort to develop outside referral resources for more thorough screening, risk assessment, and safety planning”
- Members of the coordinated community effort can help devise documentation policies that will promote safety and accountability

- Expand competent legal representation for victims of domestic abuse
- Obtain and retain adequate financial support
- √ Involve batterer intervention program partners that adhere, at minimum, to Michigan’s Batterer Intervention Standards
- √ Define batterer intervention program role in context of supervised visitation, such as: assist in training staff, assist in devising safe policies and practices, assist in assessing level of danger in a case
- √ “Anger management programs, drug/alcohol treatment, parenting skills classes, and other services that do not address the coercive, controlling use of violence should not be ordered in place of batterer intervention services for domestic violence perpetrators”
- √ Encourage the Michigan Supervised Visitation Network to include courts and advocates

SECURITY MEASURES

- Key question: If it’s so unsafe that children must visit a parent in an incarceration type of atmosphere, should there be visitation at all?
- Determining security measures that best fit an individual family’s needs begins with the court assessing risk prior to supervised visitation referral
- Security needs are never static
- “A supervised visitation center must exercise independent judgment in deciding whether it can safely accommodate a court-referral”
- Security includes attention to information management issues around confidentiality and disclosure

- √ Attention to “whole community” risk assessment
- √ Recommend approach to risk assessment that considers the abused parent’s perception of risk, the perpetrator’s behavior and attitudes, and factors related to the abused parent’s personal, social, and community circumstances
- √ Recognize that many victims do not seek help in ways that leave a public record and documentation
- √ Emphasize physical space, staggered arrival/departure, keypad access, cameras, and relationship with law enforcement over security guards and metal detectors
- √ Forbid service of court papers (e.g., personal protection order, warrants) at visitation centers

SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

SECURITY MEASURES

- ✓ Recommend periodic reviews or other hearings in some cases to monitor risk and compliance with court orders
- ✓ Two key questions before gathering information:
 - 1) Is it essential to providing services safely?
 - 2) How might a perpetrator misuse the information or retaliate?
- ✓ Security considerations include:
 - What makes each abused parent and child feel safe
 - Whether center can realistically take the precautions needed
 - Court orders that restrict one parent's interaction with another
 - Cultural, social, or environmental factors that increase or decrease safety
- ✓ Discourage practice of “log books” where parents write notes to one another
- ✓ Conduct an inventory of privacy requirements related to funding, professional licensing of center staff, individual court orders, and center policies and service agreements
- ✓ Maintain separate files for each parent and child

SUSTAINABILITY

- No single source of funding is likely to sustain services
- ✓ Promote state allocation
- ✓ Each community should work to identify long-term support for the supervised visitation center

