

MECKLENBURG COUNTY
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ADVISORY BOARD
2018 ANNUAL REPORT

presented to
Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners
and
Charlotte City Council

April 2, 2018

The Domestic Violence Advisory Board currently consists of the following individuals¹

Gabrielle Alsop
Neil Bloomfield (Chair)
Lauren Egleston (Vice Chair)

Ryan Lougheed
Antoinette Mingo
Tiffani Newbold
Patricia J. Wiley

¹ The Domestic Violence Advisory Board is intended to be a board of 13 individuals, but currently only has 7 members and has been similarly understaffed all year.

The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members.

– Mahatma Gandhi

I. Summary

By the time you finish reading this report, 600 women, men and children in this country will suffer from domestic violence.² For more than 25 years, the Domestic Violence Advisory Board (the “DVAB”) has worked with organizations in our community to improve the services provided to individuals affected by domestic violence. During that time, there have been significant accomplishments in the services and support offered to the individuals affected by domestic violence, including:

- The opening of the Clyde and Ethel Dickson Domestic Violence Shelter (the “DV Shelter”) as an 80 bed, 40,000 square foot facility that includes 10 units for single adults and 19 apartment style suites for families;
- The opening of the Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Center to allow trained professionals to help facilitate and monitor visits and custody exchanges between parents and their children; and
- The creation of the Domestic Violence Data Warehouse (“Data Warehouse”) as an online resource to track the impact that domestic violence has on our community.

Despite these successes and many others, much work still remains. After assessing the services provided in our community today, the tremendous progress that has been made over the last 25 years, and the challenges that persist, we make the following recommendations:

A. Rental Subsidy – We recommend providing a rental subsidy to survivors of domestic violence to allow those that have longer term housing needs—without the need for a secure facility—the opportunity to move out of the DV Shelter and prevent others from being turned away when their needs are the most critical.

² This assumes that you spend a half hour with this report. According to the National Coalition against Domestic Violence, nearly 20 people per minute are abused by an intimate partner in the United States. This equates to more than 10 million people annually. This is an issue of life and death. The National Network to End Domestic Violence reports that 3 women in our country die each day due to domestic violence. See <http://www.safealliance.org/>

- B. Domestic Violence Advocate at the Salvation Army – We recommend funding a position to provide services to survivors of domestic violence that wind up seeking temporary housing services outside of the DV shelter. We have seen a particular need for this at the Salvation Army shelter where survivors of domestic violence receive assistance but not services targeted to their needs as survivors of domestic violence.
- C. Additional Personnel to Assist with the E-Filing Initiative – We recommend providing funding to the Mecklenburg County Clerk of Court to retain at least one additional resource to assist in the processing of protective orders and domestic violence matters more generally to address the additional demands in converting records to an electronic format and addressing the expected continuing increase in survivors seeking protective orders as the electronic filing initiative expands within the county.
- D. Outreach and Prevention Position for Community Support Services – We recommend funding a position within Community Support Services (“CSS”) focused on outreach and prevention of domestic violence.
- E. Monitoring for the Implementation of Strangulation Training – We recommend requiring the monitoring of the implementation of the Training Institute’s Strangulation Prevention training program to make sure that the important lessons provided by this program are implemented throughout the county.

We make these recommendations in an effort to improve the services provided in our community. We believe these recommendations should be funded in addition to—not in replace of—the existing services for survivors of domestic violence.

II. Detailed Recommendations

In 1992, Charlotte-Mecklenburg County formed a citizen advisory commission entitled the Domestic Violence Advisory Board, with members appointed by the Mayor, the Board of County Commissioners (“BOCC”), and the Charlotte City Council, to address the systemic problems associated with domestic violence. The Board is charged with reviewing and evaluating domestic violence services and making appropriate recommendations to the BOCC and City Council. The Board is also entrusted with the task of providing vigorous advocacy for domestic violence survivors and playing a role in increasing public awareness and education pertaining to the problems and related costs of domestic violence within the community. We have prepared this report as part of the effort to discharge that duty.

A. DV Survivor Rent Subsidy

1. Recommendation

We recommend providing funding for survivors of domestic violence to find housing outside of the DV Shelter. Mecklenburg County has received a grant from the Office of Violence Against Women in the amount of \$349,000, which they expect will allow them to provide funding for housing and related services for 20 individuals for a period of one year. Based on the available data, there is a need for funding of as much as \$5.8 million to address the 336 individuals turned away from the DV Shelter because of capacity issues. We think an appropriate amount of funding would be **\$600,000**, which based on estimates we have received would fund housing for 50 individuals along with **\$100,000** to provide funding for additional resources to help implement the program for a total of **\$700,000**.

We recommend providing flexibility with a portion of the funding to cover necessary expenses outside of rent to meet the individualized needs of the survivors.³ These additional funds may be used to address financial issues caused by the abuser or issues necessary to help the survivor transition to an independent life, including car repairs to maintain employment, childcare costs, expunging convictions, or assistance repairing bad credit.

2. Basis for the Recommendation

The available shelter facilities in Mecklenburg County are not meeting the needs of our community. The DV Shelter was full on 362 days during the 2015-2016 fiscal year and 293

³ See Cris Sullivan & Linda Olsen, *Common ground, complementary approaches: adapting Housing First model for domestic violence survivors*, Housing and Society (available at <https://safehousingpartnerships.org/sites/default/files/2017-06/Sullivan-Olsen-Adapting%20the%20Housing%20First%20Model%20for%20DV%20Survivors-6-2017.pdf>).

days during the 2016-2017 fiscal year.⁴ During the 2016-2017 fiscal year, the Shelter made 336 referrals to other shelters because of a lack of space.⁵ This problem is increasing rapidly. In 2014-2015 combined, 65 women and children were turned away.⁶ The shelter protects some of the most vulnerable in our community. For example, 48% (377/787) are children and 8% (62/787) have one or more physical disabilities.⁷

This is disproportionately a Mecklenburg County issue. Wake County, which is the only county in North Carolina that resembles Mecklenburg in terms of population, turned away less than half of the individuals that were turned away in our community.⁸ In the small surrounding counties, their services are consistently meeting the needs of their communities. Cabarrus' shelter was at capacity a total of 255 days, but was never forced to refer a survivor to another shelter due to a lack of space.⁹ Iredell and Union Counties were never at capacity.¹⁰ (See Appendix A for further detail.)

Based on our discussions with service providers in the community, we understand that the capacity issues with the DV Shelter relate to larger constraints on the availability of affordable housing in Charlotte. We have been informed that many survivors are unable to afford longer term housing and this creates a barrier to leaving the shelter.

This leaves these survivors with a difficult choice of facing homelessness or returning to their abuser. This is not a hypothetical dilemma:

- More than 80% of mothers with children experiencing homelessness have previously faced domestic violence.¹¹
- Between 22% and 57% of all homeless women report that domestic violence was the immediate cause of their homelessness.¹²

These grim statistics do not even provide the entire story. A study by Lisa Goodman Ph.D. at Boston College, titled *I have lost everything: Trade-offs of seeking safety from intimate partner violence*,¹³ shows what the problems can be. In her study, Goodman found that 62% of survivors feel they need to give up too much to secure their safety. The loss experienced by these survivors included:

- Loss of social support 20.6%
- Loss of home and sense of rootedness 19.4%

⁴ <https://ncadmin.nc.gov/about-doa/divisions/council-for-women/women-statistics> (last visited Mar. 26, 2018)

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ DV CLT presentation at 17 (February 8, 2017); see also Aratani, Y. (2009). *Homeless Children and Youth, Causes and Consequences*. New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty.

¹² DV CLT presentation at 17 (February 8, 2017)

¹³ The results of this study were presented at the DV CLT meeting on February 8, 2017. This survey included 301 domestic violence survivors in 3 states from 18 domestic violence programs.

- Loss of financial stability 19.4%
- Loss of control over parenting 15.8%
- Loss of freedom 12.7%

Providing survivors who need it with stable, longer-term housing can help alleviate some of these concerns and allow the DV Shelter to provide services to those who need it most.

3. Implementing Entity

We believe Safe Alliance is in the best position to lead a partnership to responsibly manage the additional funding. Safe Alliance runs the DV Shelter and received the grant from the Office of Violence Against Women. The recommendation for additional funding for longer term housing is supported by the Domestic Violence Community Leadership Team (the “DV CLT”).¹⁴

B. Domestic Violence Advocate at the Salvation Army

1. Recommendation

We recommend funding a position to provide services to survivors of domestic violence that receive housing assistance outside of the DV Shelter. We have seen a particular need for these services at the Salvation Army Center for Hope Shelter for Women and Children (The “Salvation Army Shelter”) where survivors of domestic violence receive assistance, but not services targeted to their needs as survivors of domestic violence. We estimate this position, including benefits and expenses, would cost **\$60,000 annually**.

2. Basis for the Recommendation

As discussed above, the DV Shelter cannot provide services to all those in our community that need it. In addition to capacity issues, not all survivors of domestic violence are aware of the DV Shelter and they seek assistance elsewhere, including at the Salvation Army Shelter. Based on available data regarding the percentage of women where the immediate cause of homelessness is domestic violence, the Salvation Army likely houses more than 100 families on a nightly basis that are there at least in part because of domestic violence. In fact, this happened to one of our former Members during her time on the DVAB. While the Salvation Army Shelter provides an invaluable service to so many in our community, it does not provide resources for survivors of domestic violence. We recommend funding one position to provide domestic violence services to survivors that seek shelter with the Salvation Army Shelter or other organizations within the community that are not specifically set up to address the needs of these survivors.

3. Implementing Entity

We believe that Safe Alliance is in the best position to provide staffing for this need. Safe Alliance already provides these services in the DV Shelter and would be able to leverage from those services.

C. Additional Personnel to Assist with Electronic Filing

1. Recommendation

We recommend providing additional funding to the Mecklenburg County Clerk of Court to upgrade its technology and retain two additional resources to assist in the processing of protective orders and domestic violence matters more generally. We estimate this technology upgrade and additional staff will cost **\$240,000** over a period of two years.

2. Basis for the Recommendation

One of the most promising initiatives we have been informed of over the past year is the effort to modernize the process for obtaining a protective order. This initiative includes work by the Clerk of Court to convert to an electronic filing system for domestic violence cases. It also includes a process to permit survivors of domestic violence to obtain an initial protective order without having to come to the courthouse in uptown Charlotte.

This initiative provides a number of advantages over the current system. The electronic filing of paperwork will allow police officers in our community to have the protective orders with them wherever they are in the community, which will aid in their ability to serve these protective orders on the alleged abusers. The Sheriff's Office is charged with servicing domestic violence protective orders. Below are statistics on this work over the past nine years. Two things become clear when studying this chart. First, the number of domestic violence protective orders has increased by 65% over the past eight years. Second, the ability of the Sherriff's Office to serve these orders has seen a corresponding decrease of 17%. Put another way, the number of domestic violence protective orders that were obtained but not served has increased by more than 450%. (Additional detail is contained in Appendix B.)

While we do not know all of the reasons that a protective order may not get served, through our discussion with representatives of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department ("CMPD") and others, we understand that having the restraining orders prepared and available electronically makes it easier to serve them.

Domestic violence eFiling systems are already operational in Alamance, Davidson, Durham, Forsyth, Guilford, and Wake counties. These counties have experienced a number of advantages. Their systems allow advocates to file complaints from a secure location and obtain protective orders in a short amount of time. It eliminates the manual handling of paper work which reduces the risk of physical harm to survivors. Judges can access the court documents and sign orders more quickly. Law enforcement officers can search and access the electronic records, which facilitates faster service.¹⁵

Allowing survivors to appear through video conference will ease the burden on survivors, particularly those that do not have access to reliable transportation. This addresses a long-standing recommendation of the DVAB to appoint a magistrate judge to the northern end of Mecklenburg County. The DVAB has consistently made this recommendation because survivors currently must travel long distances across the county to seek justice. If these video conference locations can be stationed throughout the County, including in the northern end of the County, the need to have magistrates in additional locations is lessened. It also allows the survivors to stay within a location that is already providing domestic violence services, including care for the survivor's minor children.

3. Implementing Entity.

We believe that the Clerk of Court is the best entity to implement this recommendation. The overall initiative to improve the process for obtaining domestic violence protective orders, including allowing video conferencing and electronic filing to obtain such orders is part of a recommendation from the DV CLT, and the request for an additional resource in the Clerk of Court is supported by the members of the DV CLT.¹⁶

D. Outreach and Prevention Position for Community Support Services

1. Recommendation

We recommend that you fund an additional Information and Education Coordinator to expand the outreach prevention services provided by Community Support Services. We estimate this position will cost **\$59,395**.

2. Basis for the Recommendation

Domestic violence is cyclic in nature. Those that experience domestic violence are more likely to become victims or perpetrators of domestic violence. Efforts focused on prevention are

¹⁵ See http://www.nccourts.org/Citizens/JData/Documents/Technology_eFiling_Facts.pdf

¹⁶ DV CLT presentation at Slide 10, 14-15 (February 8, 2017)

essential to stopping this cycle and they can prevent the need for much more expensive efforts down the road.

The individual in this position would be responsible for both public awareness and prevention efforts particularly with respect to children exposed to dating and domestic violence. The individual would be responsible for working with schools and community agencies to provide trainings, integrate policies and programs, and facilitate understanding on the of the need to work together to address these issues. (A copy of the job description is at Appendix C.)

3. Implementing Entity

CSS has one full time employee for the entire county that is responsible for these outreach efforts. We recommend this second position also be a part of CSS.

E. Monitoring for the Strangulation Training

1. Recommendation

We recommend requiring monitoring of the implementation of the Training Institute's Strangulation Prevention training program to make sure that the lessons provided by this program are implemented throughout the County.

2. Basis for the Recommendation

Men who strangle women are some of, if not the most, dangerous individuals in our community. Through some great work coordinating resources led by the CMPD, the Advanced Four Day Course on Strangulation Investigations and Prosecutions offered by the Training Institute on Strangulation Prevention will take place in Charlotte in June.

The threats that these perpetrators present is not hypothetical; we have seen it in our community. In the first domestic violence homicide in our community this year, Jonathan Bennett killed his girlfriend, Brittany White, and then ambushed and tried to kill police officers in the parking lot of the Law Enforcement Center. Before the murder and the attack on police officers, Ms. White filed for a domestic violence protection order in April of 2017 in which she stated that Mr. Bennett had strangled her multiple times.

We have the law to properly address this crime, but it is not being properly enforced. In 2016, the CMPD took 308 reports that listed strangulation as an offense. These reports led to 256 arrests, but only eight convictions for the crime of Assault Inflicting Physical Injury by Strangulation. This is a 3.1% conviction rate.

We believe this training will help. The Training Institute Program is designed to improve the community's response to strangulation by giving the entire criminal justice, medical, and legal systems the tools they need to identify, investigate, and successfully prosecute near and non-fatal strangulation cases. The training addresses techniques for investigators and victim

advocates to use when educating survivors on the dangers they face from partners who strangle, as well as how to help mitigate the trauma inflicted. This training will also address the signs and statistics associated with strangulation to service providers with connections to domestic violence from 911 operators, police and EMTs to district attorneys and judges.

While this training is helpful, it is essential that additional work is done to make sure that the procedures and techniques learned during the training are understood and implemented within the organizations participating in the training and institutionalized fully throughout the systems within the operating procedures.

3. Implementing Entity

We think that the City Manager's office should oversee the implementation of this training. In aid of this process, the CMPD raised the initial funding for this training and their leadership has brought this training to our community. We believe that they may be the appropriate entity to coordinate reporting on this training. The training is supported by the DV CLT.

Appendix A

Domestic Violence	Shelter Services					
July 2016-June 2017**	Children under 18	Adults 18-59	Adults 60+	Number of Physically Disabled	Referrals to Other Shelters (Lack of Space)	Number of Days Shelter was Full
North Carolina	4,902	6,136	192	921	4,142	8,318
Mecklenburg- Shelter	377	410	3	62	336	293
Cabarrus	45	86	1	0	0	255
Durham	92	68	3	2	146	291
Forsyth- Family Services	105	107	0	1	11	11
Forsyth- Next Step	33	51	3	3	193	276
Iredell	115	138	3	5	59	0
Union	62	66	2	7	3	0
Wake	98	134	3	4	160	266

Appendix B

Protective Orders									
Actions	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
50B Orders Received	4499	3727	3395	3551	3681	3423	3510	3261	2732
50B Orders Served	3277	2889	2889	2890	2871	3103	2818	2855	2466
Restraining Order Cases filed	3,170	3111	2898	2934	2909	3040	2843	2878	2643
% of Orders Received that are Served	73%	78%	85%	81%	78%	91%	80%	88%	90%
Orders Received but not Served	1222	838	506	661	810	320	692	406	266

Below is a description of the request provided by the Clerk of Court

Clerk of Court E-Filing Support - \$50,000 (One Time Funding)

On Monday, February 26, 2018, representatives from the North Carolina Administrative Offices of the Court hosted an onsite demonstration of the Domestic Violence E-filing System. The e-filing system, developed by Tybera in 2013, has the potential to significantly reduce the time it takes to file a complaint, generate a protective order and have it filed by the Clerk, reviewed by the Judge and served by the Sheriff. The demonstration and feedback received from other North Carolina pilot sites, revealed a number of software enhancement that are critical to the success of a local launch. Such enhancements would include Optimal Character Recognition designed to ensure the automatic upload of data from scanned documents and Customized Batch Printing that prints documents sets eliminating the need to open and print single documents. Unlike other counties, these enhancements are non-negotiable in processing the high volume of petitions filed and heard in our courts and served by our Sheriff's Office.

Increase in Clerk Staff Dedicated to the Domestic Violence Unit: 2.0 FTE - \$94,066.28 for two or three years

The Mecklenburg County Clerk's Office currently staffs two positions funded by the North Carolina Governor's Crime Commission. Like most GCC grants, expiration of these funds are an eventuality. To ensure the Clerk's Domestic Violence Unit is well positioned to absorb the technical and time-sensitive duties associated with launching e-filing long term, two FTE positions are requested.

Appendix C

Improved Violence Prevention Outreach (\$59,395) – An additional Information and Education Coordinator will assist with public awareness and prevention efforts with youth exposed to dating and domestic violence. This additional Information and Education Coordinator will expand the prevention services within CSS to facilitate and integrate prevention efforts addressing issues related to the interconnectedness of various forms of violence, including domestic violence, youth violence, sexual violence, child maltreatment, suicide, bullying and elder maltreatment. This position will be responsible for working with schools and community agencies as well as community residents to strengthen resiliency factors and reduce risk factors that affect communities. The position will provide trainings, work to integrate policies and programs as well as help individuals and communities understand the need to break down silos to work together to build safer communities. This request includes \$2,710 in one-time expenses for equipment and technology for the new position.