

CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ADVISORY BOARD
2019 ANNUAL REPORT

presented to
Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners
and
Charlotte City Council

March 31, 2019

The Domestic Violence Advisory Board currently consists of the following individuals

Tyrone Bennett
Neil Bloomfield (Chair)
Shantia Coley
Deshall Hill
Tanisha Patterson-Powe (Vice Chair)
Racquel Ward
Cynthia Wesley

I. Summary

The Domestic Violence Advisory Board (“DVAB” or “Board”) is the official citizen advisory commission on domestic violence issues. The members are appointed by and report to the Board of County Commissioners and Charlotte City Council. The DVAB receives staff support from the Mecklenburg County Community Support Services Prevention and Intervention Services Division.

The Board periodically reviews and evaluates all Charlotte and Mecklenburg County domestic violence services; makes appropriate recommendations to Charlotte City Council and the Board of County Commissioners to identify gaps or additional services to meet the needs of victims of domestic violence and their children; and provides vigorous advocacy for domestic violence awareness and its related costs to victims and the community.

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 are reasserting the following recommendations made in our 2018 report:

- A. Rental Subsidy – We recommend providing a rental subsidy to survivors of domestic violence who need financial assistance to secure stable permanent housing. Many survivors require ongoing support to locate and sustain their own permanent housing after leaving an abusive household and/or following an emergency stay at the Safe Alliance Clyde and Ethel Dickson Domestic Violence Shelter (“DV Shelter”). Due to high demand for emergency shelter, the DV Shelter does not have capacity to shelter survivors beyond an emergency stay.
- B. Domestic Violence Advocate at the Salvation Army – We recommend funding a position to provide services to survivors of domestic violence that seek emergency shelter in homeless shelters other than the DV Shelter. We have seen a particular need for this at the Salvation Army Center of Hope homeless shelter for women and children, where survivors of domestic violence often seek shelter and receive assistance but not services targeted to their needs as survivors of domestic violence.
- C. Outreach and Prevention Position for Community Support Services – We recommend funding a position within Mecklenburg County Community Support Services (“CSS”) focused on outreach and prevention of domestic violence.
- D. 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 they should be funded in addition to—not in replacement of—the existing services for survivors of domestic violence.

Last year we recommended funding for additional personnel to assist with an e-filing initiative of the Mecklenburg County Clerk of Court. We are pleased to report that the City of Charlotte funded a new position at a total cost of \$54,837 and that these funds have been put to good use. The individual is an e-filing Court Advocate who has allowed establishment of workflow processes that improve the chances of a victim receiving a domestic violence protective order (DVPO) and prepare Mecklenburg County for a successful DVPO electronic filing process. This position is part of an ongoing effort to reduce the burden on victims of domestic violence as they seek protection from our community’s judicial system. The Court Advocate is staffed in Safe Alliance’s Victim Assistance Office and is also assisting in their outreach efforts. The North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts (NCAOC) continues to work with Mecklenburg County on technological enhancements to the Electronic Filing System in preparation for implementation.

II. Detailed Recommendations

We have prepared this report as part of the DVAB’s responsibility to assess gaps and make appropriate recommendations related to domestic violence services in our community. For each issue we have identified, the report contains a recommendation, the support for that recommendation, and a recommendation for the entity best situated to carry out the recommendation.

A. DV Survivor Rent Subsidy

1. Recommendation

We recommend providing funding for survivors of domestic violence to find housing outside of the DV Shelter. In partnership with Safe Alliance and Community Link, Mecklenburg County CSS received a domestic violence transitional housing assistance grant from the Office on Violence Against Women in 2016 in the amount of \$349,000 spread over three years. Through this grant, 17 families have received transitional housing assistance for a maximum of 16 months. Based on the available data, there is a need for funding of as much as \$2.9 million to address the annual average of 165 individuals referred to other shelters due to capacity issues. We think an appropriate initial amount of funding would be **\$900,000**, which based on estimates we have received may fund housing subsidies for up to 50 individuals along with **\$100,000** to provide funding for additional resources to help implement the program for a total of **\$1,000,000**. Given the \$50 million bond for low income housing approved by the voters in November 2018, the need for affordable housing is clearly important to our community and

the requested allocation for victims of domestic violence is a small subset of the available funding.

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.¹ 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.² As evidenced in the chart below, over the past three years, the DV Shelter is regularly at capacity and unable to take in everyone in need.

Fiscal Year	Number of Days the Shelter Was at Capacity	Referrals to Other Shelters (Lack of Space)
2015-2016	362	20
2016-2017	293	336
2017-2018	194	140
Average	283	165

These populations are some of our most vulnerable. More than half of the population is made up of children and almost 10% are individuals dealing with disabilities.³

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.⁴

¹ 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>).

² <https://ncadmin.nc.gov/about-doa/divisions/council-for-women/women-statistics> (last visited Mar. 26, 2018)

³ *Id.*

⁴ 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.

- Between 22% and 57% of all homeless women report that domestic violence was the immediate cause of their homelessness.⁵

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*,⁶ 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%
- 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 is a leading partner in Mecklenburg County CSS' transitional housing assistance grant from the Office on Violence Against Women. The recommendation for additional funding for longer term housing is supported by the Domestic Violence Community Leadership Team (the "DV CLT").⁷

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 emergency shelter 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**.

⁵ DV CLT presentation at 17 (February 8, 2017)

⁶ 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.

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 shelters 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. 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 CSS. We estimate this position will cost **\$62,102**.

2. Basis for the Recommendation

Domestic violence is cyclical and inter-generational in nature. Those that experience domestic violence or witness domestic violence at home are more likely to become victims or perpetrators of domestic violence. Efforts focused on prevention are 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 and teens exposed to dating and domestic violence. The individual would be responsible for working with schools and community agencies to provide trainings, engage youth, integrate policies and programs, and facilitate understanding of the need to work together to address these issues. (A copy of the job description is at Appendix A.)

3. Implementing Entity

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

D. 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 was provided in Charlotte last year.

We have the law to properly address this crime, but historically it has not been effectively 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.

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 also addresses 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.

But 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 Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department 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 because they have information about who has attended the trainings, they continue to provide the strangulation trainings in the community, and they have the expertise to monitor successful implementation of the training in practice. The training is supported by the DV CLT.

Appendix A

Information and Education Coordinator (\$62,102) – An Information and Education Coordinator position in the Prevention and Intervention Services Division will expand domestic violence and teen dating violence prevention activities in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and throughout the community. Essential functions of this position include educating teens and adults about teen dating violence and domestic violence, conducting outreach and education in schools and other agencies, creating and maintaining community partnerships, and facilitating teen leadership programming. During the first and second quarter of FY2019, prevention program staff provided 93 educational presentations about dating abuse to 2,766 teenagers in Mecklenburg County. These presentations occurred at six non-profit agencies, five middle schools, and 10 high schools. Additionally, prevention staff reached 2,099 people through community events. A Memorandum of Understanding exists between Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and the department that recognizes CSS as the provider of dating violence education in schools. A new Information and Education coordinator position will add 15 more middle schools and six more high schools. Prevention is a cost-effective and efficient approach to stem the impact of domestic violence early on, as opposed to investing significant human and financial capital to address trauma after it occurs.