

New Jersey Advisory Council on
Domestic Violence



NJCEDV Domestic Violence Response Team
2014 Focus Group Report

**New Jersey Advisory Council on Domestic Violence
Focus Group Project
Focus Group #2: September 23, 2014**

Domestic Violence Response Teams

Domestic Violence Response Teams (usually referred to as DVRT) were formed to provide twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week service to domestic violence victims. DVRT Teams are composed of trained volunteer citizen advocates. All volunteers go through a rigorous screening process followed by an intensive 40+ hour training. The Prevention of Domestic Violence Act included a provision for a domestic violence response team in 1994. A further revision was made to the Act in 2000 which mandated the availability of this resource for victims. After the 2000 revision was passed, teams were formed across the state.

Summary Report

Background

The DVRT focus group was attended by 11 participants, who are coordinators of Domestic Violence Response Teams. Also present were Lynda Carson, Director of Training and Member Services at the New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence who facilitated the focus group, David Broselli, Advisory Council representative who helped facilitate and take notes, and Julia Cusano, intern at the New Jersey Coalition for Battered Women, who helped take notes. After introductions and a briefing by the facilitator, the group discussed and answered the focus group questions (outlined below). All ideas were recorded on a laptop owned by the New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence (in addition to the hand-written back-up notes taken by the two facilitators and Ms. Cusano).

The following is a summary of information gathered through the focus group discussion and the participants' individual answers. Each question answered is represented below. The points made by participants have been categorized to support easier reading and analysis of the data. Please note that many of the items overlap and intertwine, particularly around funding, and could therefore reasonably be placed in several different categories. For organizational purposes, we have categorized participants' answers according to our judgment of where they best fit. Information by participants is not attributed to them by name or affiliated county.

Summary

Question 1: From your perspective, what are the things that currently work well with respect to laws, policies, and services for survivors of domestic violence?

Many of the subjects that were discussed fell into the categories of supportive laws and positive relationships with law enforcement as well as how these two categories impact one another. Participants noted that relationships with their county Police Departments have improved over the last couple of years as a result of recent Domestic Violence Laws and policies. The following responses were given by participants.

- The full time salary for the Domestic Violence Response Team position is not even a livable wage for one full time coordinator and as a result staff keeps rotating in these positions because there is just way too much for one person to do.

Housing

- Housing is a huge issue. In many counties, if a woman and her children are ready to leave their homes where domestic violence is occurring, there is no room in the county shelter for them.
- Domestic Violence Response Teams cannot confidently say that there will be housing for victims and their children.

Lack of Uniform Service Utilization

- There are huge inconsistencies with the utilization of Domestic Violence Response Teams.
- Many coordinators have had difficulty with Police Departments following their own protocol and there is not a lot of accountability which it makes it really difficult.
- There is a problem that some presiding municipal judges will not follow protocol and speak with victims prior to either granting or denying an emergent restraining order.

Law Enforcement

- There has been a large turnover of officers and liaison officers and this makes it difficult because you establish a relationship with the Domestic Violence Liaison Officer and then they leave.
- Not having a consistent liaison officer makes it really hard.
- One of the things that I'm finding is that the officers need to be refreshed, constantly refreshed, and we do not have the opportunity to provide the trainings necessary to keep this information relevant in officers' minds.
- Within each Police Department you have a different culture that begins with the Police Chief, which can make things difficult.
- Having a huge problem with having the domestic violence liaison officer at the meetings.

Unaffiliated Teams (are DVRTs not affiliated with the county domestic violence program)

- Unaffiliated teams cause a huge disparity of services and issues of confidentiality. They are not covered under the umbrella of confidentiality.
- Unaffiliated members trying to join other affiliated Domestic Violence Response Teams it is not in the best interest of victims.

Question 3: Are there societal and/or trends within the field of domestic violence about which those involved in the field or impacted by it should take notes in our consideration of future directions?

The group discussed the increased need for specialized services for domestic violence victims, many as a result of the economic climate and the impact of Hurricane Sandy. The group also discussed numerous other trends.

Uniformity of Services and Approaches

- We need to address the lack of consistency in the implementation of the Domestic Violence Response Team program, from training to police departments working with us.

Increased Accountability

- There needs to be fluid accountability for adhering to protocols that's followed up with and properly followed up.
- There needs to be very clear and defined protocols that are set aside and all necessary parties must know the proper steps to take and that there's steps that we can take and our clients can take to ensure that they get proper service.
- Future needs are more accountability for municipal police officers to contact the presiding judge for an emergent restraining order.
- It is important that batterers are really held more accountable for their actions.

Legislative

- A mandate that police departments have to establish a team and a DVRT program. If there was more of a mandate or a buy in from a higher level, it would force the Police Departments to work with the Domestic Violence Response Team.
- There is a need to establish a higher mandate that all Police Departments have to be involved with the Domestic Violence Response Team service provider in their community.
- Consistent and enforced consequences for violators of Temporary Restraining Orders.

Question 5: How can those involved in the field of domestic violence or impacted by it ensure that these needs and priorities will be addressed and the necessary programs created?

Participants discussed the importance of recording data in a timely manner to track Domestic Violence statistics and collecting data that effectively measures Domestic Violence Response Team outcomes. Participants also discussed developing a better way to "market" the field more effectively, and methods of ensuring that evidence-based services are publicized as well as utilized.

Data and Evidence-Based Strategies

- Domestic violence statistics that mean something and that are properly recorded to accurately reflect what is occurring and what Domestic Violence Response Teams are doing to help.
- Many people that come into headquarters and are just requesting information are not accounted for, these victims are not being accounted for, so maybe there needs to be a change in the way that statistics are counted

Marketing Services

- As non-profits we are not created to market our services for victims so that should be done as a part of the state and on a state level.

All the funding in the world is not going to help unless this becomes mandatory and there are consequences to (PD) departments who don't utilize the DVRTs.

I think a discussion about determinates if funding increases, how to court needed staff, movement from volunteer to paid staff. I don't believe that counting municipalities would be effective (in deciding how many DVRT staff are needed). Need to figure out through current work: hotline calls, safe house resident number and number of outreach clients.

None, great meeting, very good insight.

Relationships are always the key to making accountability/ implementation work. Multiple systems are involved, must have the time to communicate.

We make a difference!

Restraining orders to sexual assault victims as well. Greater funding for BIP programs, and funding for liaison positions with DV agencies and Police Departments and courts. More services for male domestic violence victims.

Recommendations to move forward:

- Continue to find funding sources for the work of the DVRTs to maintain their staff and programs;
- Continue conversations with local law enforcement agencies around the utilization of DVRTs to ensure consistent policies among both parties regardless of county;
- Domestic Violence liaison officers should be highly encouraged to attend DVRT meetings to build that partnership;
- Programs should seek more bilingual staff and volunteers to more broadly service marginalized communities;
- Increase prevention efforts in schools or other community programs to discuss healthy relationships and raise awareness of the signs of abuse with children starting from young age;
- Find more housing options for DV victims (both men and women) and their children so they can escape violence.