Office on Violence Against Women
Safe Havens Supervised Visitation and Exchange Program

Michigan Demonstration Site
Safety & Accountability Audit Planning Assessment

Report to the Michigan Demonstration Site Advisory Committees
Prepared by Praxis International

June 25, 2004

Exploring the Question: What is the role of a supervised visitation center?

In October 2003, a team comprised of representatives from four Michigan visitation centers,[1] their collaborative partners, and the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) technical assistance providers[2] conducted an assessment in each of the four demonstration site communities in order to explore how centers understood their role in serving families with a history of domestic violence.

In February 2004, the technical assistance providers (Praxis and NCJFCJ) and local members of the four assessment teams met in Mt. Pleasant with the visitation center directors, directors of their parent agencies, their domestic violence partners, and staff from the Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board. They reviewed and discussed preliminary findings from the assessment and the implications for long-term planning. That meeting concluded with plans for a series of audio conferences with the advisory committees to establish common language and ways of thinking about issues of domestic violence and the centers' activities.[3] These calls would be followed by a June 25th videoconference linking all four centers as they meet simultaneously with their advisory boards in their local communities.

---

[1] Child and Family Services of Northwestern Michigan: Safe Haven Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Program, Traverse City; Child and Parent Center: Supervised Parenting Time, Jackson; Every Woman's Place: Muskegon County Safe Haven Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange, Muskegon; and, HAVEN: Supervised Parenting Time, Pontiac.

[2] Praxis International (www.praxisinternational.org, 651-699-8000) and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (www.nationalcouncilfvd.edu, 800-527-3223).

[3] The audio conference series was conducted April 23 – May 21 and included these topics: 1) Complexities of Domestic Violence, 2) Interagency Collaboration and the Function of Advisory Committees, 3) Interventions for Safety: Visitation Centers and the Collaborative Effort, and 4) Accounting for Batterers' Tactics in Visitation Centers.

This structure allows all four advisory committees to hear the assessment findings together and have preliminary discussions with representatives from the state to a) help local centers clarify their roles in cases where there has been a history of domestic violence and b) define the role of advisory boards in helping to create the conditions necessary for visitation centers to successfully serve families. The Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board has the charge of forming a statewide advisory council and developing operating principles for Michigan visitation centers. Its presence at the four sites on June 25th will help ensure that the local advisory councils and the state advisory council coordinate with and complement each other's work. This report highlights the findings and related information that will be presented at the June 25th meetings.

The primary issue that we all came away with is the need to really focus on safety as it pertains to domestic violence . . . We have some ideas about how we can do this; we are going to try some new things – some will work, some may not – so we expect to continue to refine this as we go along. – Shelia Hankins Project Director of Michigan Safe Havens Demonstration Site, MDVPTB.

The Assessment Week

Two consultants from the technical assistance project and a representative from the state joined local center staff and advisory board members at each site October 21-25, 2003 to gather information for the assessment. Over fifty practitioners at the four sites participated in interviews, observations and case studies that helped explicate a number of key *role decisions* that centers and their collaborating partners must make in order to provide responsive and meaningful interventions with families in the context of domestic violence.

Across the four sites, the team read intake and observation notes, phone logs, visitation center case files, and family court records. They conducted focus group interviews with parents, visitation center staff, judges, attorneys representing battered women in divorce and custody proceedings, Friends of the Court, batterer treatment group facilitators, domestic violence victim advocates, administrators (from courts, visitation centers, and domestic violence service programs), and a fathers' group organizers. They observed intake appointments with visiting and custodial parents, orientation appointments with children, parenting classes, visitation sessions, training for monitors, and exchanges. Each site visit ended with a debriefing discussion where we began to articulate the themes that were emerging for us in relation to center roles and that provide the basis for this report.

Throughout this report we use the word *centers* rather than identifying specific centers or particular staff at centers. The focus of our inquiry was on the overarching role questions that all visitation centers face. Local team members will address any concerns that are particular to their individual center and community. While some observations or comments may be more applicable to one site than to another, all of the centers faced some version of the problems and questions highlighted in the following pages. Our interest was to recognize gaps between the needs of families using the centers, in the context of battering and domestic violence, and the ways in which the work of the centers was organized and structured to close or widen those gaps.

We were not looking for, nor did we find that problems rested with a specific staff member or intervener's skill or abilities. On the contrary, **we found impressive social service agencies, with skilled, thoughtful staff who offered considerable insight into their work and the process of supervised visitation and exchange**.

Mission and Goals

At the Mt. Pleasant meeting, each center was asked to present the mission statement of its parent organization and visitation center, its goals for family members using the center (children, mother, father, extended family), its goals in relation to addressing the specific needs of victims of domestic abuse and their children, and its goals in relation to the wider community response to custody and access issues following a separation where there was a history of domestic violence (Attachment H).

Center staff had the following observations about the task of defining their missions and goals:

- *Our center's mission statement was developed two or three years ago, in a committee. It's not "real." It was developed for grant purposes.*
- *We realized we didn't have goals for family members. The question got us thinking about it.*
- *We've been around since 1992, but we're still trying to work this out. We think we have good policies and programs, but we don't have clear goals community-wide and center-wide for families. We're still struggling to think this through.*
- *Protecting children is a goal that we can all understand, but whose job is it to make sure that the abuser gets to batterer treatment and to alcohol treatment?*
- *We find that we are hoping that the court tells us, when they refer, what they want us to do, while (at the same time) the court is expecting us to figure that out and tell them.*

While no two sites had identical mission statements, there were a number of similar operative words or concepts in their statements, such as:

- *Promote the safety and well-being of children, adults, and families;*
- *Strengthen families;*
- *Eliminate the risk that children will be physically or sexually abused and/or abducted;*
- *Reduce the trauma and anxiety to children;*
- *Ensure a measure of safety for their mother;*
- *Safe and neutral environment;* and,
- *Conflict-free, non-judgmental visitation.*

As we began to explore the common question – *What are the various roles of visitation centers?* – we focused on the connections between what we observed, heard and analyzed in the assessment to the operative concepts in the centers' mission statements, the experiences of domestic violence victims and their children, and the collective responses and responsibilities of the many intervening agencies and practitioners. The following six themes emerged from this discussion. These are overarching themes, crossing all sites, though each center also has its own distinct experience with accounting for domestic violence, attending to safety, responding to the

complexity of competing individual needs, defining its relationship with the courts, articulating the harm done by battering, and coordinating interagency action.

1. The connection between the domestic violence that has occurred, or is occurring, and the work of the center is unclear.
2. Beyond the visit itself, the center's safety objectives are ambiguous.
3. Beyond ensuring children's safety during visits, the centers struggle with their role in providing services and supports in the context of family members' competing interests.
4. The center's role and relationship to the courts is unclear.
5. Each of the 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.
6. No organization in the four communities took on the role of coordinating interagency thinking and action to collectively ensure safety for victims of abuse in supervised visitation and exchange cases.

Themes

1. The connection between the domestic violence that has occurred, or is occurring, and the work of the center is unclear.

At each center we observed workers conduct intakes, monitor visits, negotiate a visitation schedule with parents, conduct parenting groups, facilitate safe exchanges, or some combination of these activities.[4] In all of these activities the observers tried to understand how the presence of domestic violence impacted the agency's intervention. Our observations, interviews, and review of case records, followed by debriefing sessions, led us to the conclusion that each center was unclear about how it should incorporate attention to the presence of domestic violence into its interactions with families using the centers.

The centers serve families from multiple referral sources. Two of the centers do not specialize in domestic violence cases, but serve families with a broad range of issues, including foster care, child protection, and domestic violence. There was little distinction in the centers' activities, however, that reflected the reason for a family's use of the center.

Each center used child-centered language. Two centers expressly noted, in their materials and goals, that their primary concern was for the children's safety and well-being. The centers saw themselves as neutral in the conflict between the parents, if and when it existed, but not neutral about the goal of child safety. At the same time, the centers acknowledged that some domestic violence cases involved situations where the primary person needing protection from intimidation, threats and past acts of violence was the mother who was being battered and could not safely exchange her children with her abuser. This lead to the role related question, "Should centers have equal regard for every family member's safety?" This question is not meant to imply that everyone is equally vulnerable to violence, but to acknowledge that sometimes a parent (most often a mother) is the primary target of abuse

[4] Muskegon had not yet opened its center so we focused on their plans and likely issues related to establishing and operating a visitation center.

and not the children, although her safety clearly has implications for the children's safety. More frequently, the parent who has been battered (again, most often the mother) and the children are equally vulnerable to future violence and abuse.

While the purpose of the centers was to keep children safe, there was a dearth of information provided by referring agencies as to what made any particular family member or specific child vulnerable to violence. We found examples of court referrals with little or no information about the nature and extent of the violence. It was not uncommon for a center to first learn that it had been named in a court order when a non-custodial parent called to set up visits. The information provided by the court was uneven, depending on the location and court process involved, but none of the referral processes were adequate to the task of fully informing the center of the safety concerns prompting the use of the center.

The assessment team read files and interviewed staff about specific families using the centers. In these interviews we tried to get a picture of how domestic abuse played out in these families and how the center was prepared to attend to the dynamics of power, control, intimidation and violence. We found that all of the centers were constrained in addressing these dynamics. They approached domestic violence cases as generic visitation cases and their processes were not well designed to attend to the complexities. At the same time, the team was impressed with the skill level of the staff at each of the centers and their commitment to the families they were serving.

This observation led us to conclude that the problems need to be addressed at the design level and not at an individual staffing level. Competent staff can be constrained by a program design deficiency. For example, at one center we observed a parenting group facilitated by a staff member who was obviously highly competent in working with fathers and mothers, particularly adept at the art of compassionate confrontation, and an excellent teacher. The curriculum she used to facilitate the group, however, while nationally recognized and acclaimed, was inattentive to domestic violence and its relationship to parenting.

In another community we held a focus group with visitation center monitors and every member of the assessment team was impressed with their maturity, thoughtfulness, concern, and keen insights. We asked each staff member to give examples of cases that raised questions for them about their specific role. Everyone could easily recall a case where they felt conflicted about their role. This reflected their awareness of how the brief two-hour visit fits into a larger context of long-standing abuse, and children's complex emotions and mixed feelings of apprehension and attachment to a parent who has been abusive. Monitors' lack of clarity about their role in intervening during visits with fathers who have a history of domestic abuse illustrated the dilemmas facing center staff in a system marked by fragmented and often weak response to custody and access decisions when there is this history of violence.

At a third center we discussed at some length a case involving a father with a long history of physical and sexual abuse against his wife. She had filed for divorce after leaving the shelter for the third time. She requested supervised visits because the father had not returned the children on a number of occasions when they had previously separated. When the children were with their father his mother cared for them. The last time his wife left him he kept the children at his mother's for ten days; she went back to him in order to be with her children.

The father was, as one worker said, "clueless as to how to play with his children." The center worker explained her dilemma: "I was pretty sure he had never changed a diaper. I had mixed feelings. Should I just let him bumble around and record that he couldn't do these things or should I help him learn how to take care of his baby? If I do the latter he will use my notations that he is doing better with the children in his custody bid. If I let him fumble around as a father how can I say I am helping him undo the harm his children have experienced?"

The conflicting goals – being neutral, offering children quality time with their non-custodial parent, improving relationships between children and their parents, undoing the harm of abuse to children and their relationships with their parents, not colluding with batterers' attempts to continue to control and punish their partners through custody challenges and manipulation of children, and protecting battered women from further abuse – are not well thought through in relationship to the specific activities of workers in the center, nor in their relationships to the court. In interviews with staff we learned that much of the tension around the center's role in helping fathers stemmed from experiences with abusers who had successfully parlayed the use of center services to gain increased access or unsupervised visits, without exhibiting any change in abusive behaviors. All four sites were interested in using an advisory council or court collaboration to resolve this conflict.

The center is a prime site to help parents change who have been abusive to their children by: 1) undermining their relationship with the other parent, 2) using them to control or manipulate the other parent, 3) directly harming the children to hurt the other parent, and 4) using them to harm the other parent along a continuum of subtle and extreme ways. But when does the center's attempt to help backfire? In all of these forms of child abuse the children are the weapons, but the primary target is the other parent. The assessment team recognized the need for the entire collaborative to incorporate attention to these very specific forms of abuse of children in their collective interventions. These forms of abuse are the extension of battering tactics in a post-separation family structure. In our assessment we could clearly see the double-edged sword in almost everything the centers do unless the intervening human service and legal system agencies find a common understanding of the violence and abuse that characterize these cases.

2. Beyond the visit itself, the center's safety objectives are ambiguous.

During our planning meetings and assessment debriefings we had the opportunity to discuss the unique safety aspects of serving victims of domestic abuse as visitation center families. In our case file reviews and interviews with women and men using the centers, and with monitors, Friends of the Court (FOC), judges, divorce attorneys, therapists, and victim advocates, we tried to identify specific safety issues. What made people vulnerable to further harm in specific cases? From those discussions we generated a list of some of the aspects of these cases that need to be addressed in designing safe interventions. Below is a summary of those features, supplemented by information from the research in this area.

- The period after separation is very dangerous for battered women. It is when victims of abuse are most vulnerable to a sudden increase in violence and a shift in or intensification

of abusive tactics. (Mahoney and Campbell) Some post-separation safety factors are particularly relevant to the work of a visitation center:

- The likelihood of an abuser shifting control tactics to use of children increases greatly after separation.
- Batterers use a variety of tactics to instill fear and control both the mother and the children, such as smashing and throwing things, destroying favorite toys, harming or killing family pets, threatening to harm the mother, and threatening to abduct the children or seek custody of children.
- Batterers use a variety of tactics to harm the mother-child relationship, including belittling her, encouraging divided loyalties, and treating her with disrespect. (Bancroft and Silverman)

▪ Battering has a deep impact on a victim's cognitive, psychological, physical, and spiritual well-being. She may appear to visitation center staff as being resistant, obstructive, overly emotional, and "out of control."

▪ All of a victim's relationships are impacted by the violence and coercion, but the most significant impact is most likely on her relationship with her children.

▪ A battered parent may become overly authoritative with her children as a mechanism to cope with the violence and protect them.

▪ Many conditions of life circumstances and social position make victims more vulnerable to harm, such as: race, class, immigration status, mental illness, religious beliefs, alcohol or drug use.

▪ Batterers routinely attempt to engage interveners, such as police, the courts, and visitation centers, into supporting their attempts to coerce and threaten the victims of their abuse.

As we observed, read and interviewed we looked for how workers were organized to think about and act on issues of safety over three distinct time periods.

1. Safety during the exchange or actual visit (2 hours)
2. Safety during the two years following a separation (2+ years)
3. Safety on a permanent basis (20 years)

While centers' mission statements and a significant amount of their programming touched on the three time periods, we found that safety measures were most vigorously incorporated into the two-hour period when people physically used the center facility and services. We found frequent examples of centers paying attention to the ways in which the visit could harm children. They structured intake, entry, and exit procedures to avoid couples seeing each other. They were alert to and prohibited potentially harmful conversations between visiting parents and their children. They paid attention to who could visit, what gifts, toys or money could be exchanged safely, and procedures to follow should a visiting parent leave the center with a child. Overall, the centers recognized how the visit could be an opportunity to strike out at the child or the other parent.

We found that staff members at all four centers were intensely aware of how children are harmed by being made to carry messages from one parent to the other, by getting caught in what the centers often referred to as "high conflict" parental relationships. Two of the centers had adopted

the language of the Supervised Visitation Network (SVN)[5], which defines the center's role in the parental relationship as neutral. None of the staff identified their role in protecting children as neutral, however. They saw themselves as proactive in securing children's well-being and safety.

Each of the three operating centers had cases where the primary target of the abuser's violence was the mother, not the children. For example, at one center monitors discussed a case where the father had been abusive to his wife for twelve years. When she left him he threatened to kill her and began calling her several times every night. She got a protection order and asked for supervised visits because she was afraid to be near him, to talk to him on the phone about visits, and to let him be alone with the children. He had never provided any childcare and drank when the children were with him. To the center's knowledge he had never physically or sexually assaulted his children, although he had drawn them into his abuse of their mother in a number of manipulative ways.

In this case we asked center staff and administrators, "How is it that you see yourself as neutral in the relationship between the father and the mother?" This question drew all of us into long discussions about visitation centers' almost universal use of the notion of neutrality. Most centers in Michigan and throughout the country have used the important work of the Supervised Visitation Network in shaping their policies and practices. SVN gears its intervention toward cases of child abuse and has only recently begun to rethink its guidelines in light of the unique aspects of domestic abuse cases. SVN is explicit about neutrality between the parents in "high conflict" relationships. Many of the cases in the three operating centers, however, were not high conflict families, but cases where couples were separating in the midst of significant violence and intimidation by one parent against the other. To characterize these families as high conflict shifts the attention of the intervening agent from the danger posed by an abusive adult to his partner and their children, to the tensions present in the relationship that is in a process of ending or changing radically.[6] Using a framework to talk and think about these cases that is embedded in the literature of separation violence and the use of children to continue battering is far different than embedding the discussions and case consultations in the literature and research on divorce in high conflict relationships.

The three operating centers all cited examples of cases where they believed the mother was in danger and they were constrained in their "neutral" role to articulate to the court how they saw this danger. In our interviews with several judges we raised the issue and found that they varied in their take on the word *neutral*. One said, "the place is neutral, the center as a place; it's not his house and it's not her house." A judge in another city commented, "I want to hear from someone who is not directly representing either adult party. Being neutral doesn't mean I shouldn't know about something the court should consider. It doesn't mean I don't want an opinion from the center on how someone might pose a threat or danger to another; that's exactly what I need to hear."

All of the centers worked with families where there was strong evidence to conclude that the violence was continuing, but not at the center. While the centers had developed good referral relationships with other agencies, none of the four sites had a comprehensive strategy to

[5] The Supervised Visitation Network is a non-profit network of individuals and agencies whose mission is "to facilitate opportunities for children to have safe and conflict-free access to both parents through a continuum of child access services delivered by competent providers." www.svnetwork.net

[6] This separation period, as the victim of abuse attempts to leave the relationship, is particularly dangerous.

collectively intervene in ongoing violence. There seemed to be a lack of planning around the indicators of continued abuse. For example, in batterer intervention when an abuser misses several group sessions in a row, many batterer intervention programs contact the victim because such absences can be a sign of renewed violence. In the centers when a family suddenly dropped out of sight and stopped using the center, or when a victim of battering who was the non-custodial parent stopped coming, there were no protocols for following up to determine if there was renewed violence. We found cases where families stopped using the center without notice, but the center was unable to reach the victim to determine why the visits stopped. The center did not see its role as actively determining whether the change was truly with her consent.

Centers had good security measures for the visits but not necessarily for what went on outside of the centers. Centers were unclear as to how to handle reports of abuse or intimidation off the grounds of the center agency. If they didn't witness it, what was their role in documenting or reporting it? When women who said they were victims of battering told staff about calls to their homes, being followed from the center, or new verbal threats, staff typically referred to these reports as hearsay or uncorroborated or "unsubstantiated claims." Staff was reluctant to record every claim either parent made because to do so might increase the amount of complaints that are seen as petty or inconsequential. As one monitor said, "we want to know about the serious stuff; you know, anything that would make you think someone could get hurt, but we have to somehow *not* become the depository for every piece of information or misinformation about how the other party is messing up. Consequently, we have a narrow focus on only recording what we actually saw or heard and we miss documenting a great deal of the abuse. We should be pro-actively trying to document some of the destructive things we are made aware of, but to do so needs some very clear boundaries."

There was no way to check in on a regular basis with custodial parents who have been battered. In one of our interviews, a custodial mother reported that after the batterer had been granted unsupervised visits her daughter reported that he was being abusive to his new partner during the daughter's visits and that on one occasion police had been called and he was arrested. There was no process in place, however, to notify intervening systems that the non-custodial parent might pose a risk during unsupervised visitation. While the centers had a strategy to deter the violence occurring in the two-hour period, neither the centers nor their larger collaboratives had the equivalent strategy for the two-year period in which so much separation violence and abuse occurs. All of the centers saw developing such a strategy as a key task of the advisory groups.

All of the centers recognized that they were manipulated by some abusers. In one case, a staff person reported feeling "creeped out" because a visiting parent called her incessantly; in a very "charming" manner would inquire about how his soon-to-be ex-wife was faring. He wanted to relay information to her via the visitation center staff, while at the same time seeking their assurance that any report to the court would look "good." The worker told us she felt manipulated because there was no process in place whereby she could account for his troubling behavior, which occurred outside of the visitation session. All of the visitation centers expressed a need to incorporate into their processes ways to prevent their services from being used to reinforce battering. In reading the files we found that centers did not have ways of identifying much of the abuse and therefore were poorly positioned to recognize how certain actions might reinforce abuse. Across all centers, for example, we saw the intake process structured around the administrative needs of the center, to make sure parents know the rules and regulations and that

all necessary papers are signed. The intake was not oriented toward allowing the center to know who was in danger, from whom, and how.

Centers tended to have one type of visit, regardless of the reason for the visit, and treat all custodial partners one way and all non-custodial partners another, making few adjustments for levels of danger and targets of abuse. In two centers we read files where the visiting parent appeared to have been the victim of abuse by the custodial parent. The design of the center made these cases particularly difficult for staff. Where, when, and how parents arrive presumes that the visiting parent is the dangerous parent. The rules were the same when the battered woman was the visiting parent, without accounting for how following those rules may put her in greater danger by allowing opportunities before and after the visit for the batterer to have access to her.

The transition from monitored to unsupervised visits also raised questions about the center's role. We discussed cases where this transition seemed particularly risky. Every center saw the need to test the waters for unsupervised visits in certain domestic violence cases, rather than simply shifting to unsupervised visits. That kind of transitional program and role, however, requires an understanding and working relationship with the court that was not fully developed in any of the four sites.

In conversations and interviews with center staff, they raised concerns about the implications of what some saw as overly controlled visits. Many visiting parents are quite capable of following rules when being tightly monitored. After ten or so visits in which a parent follows all the rules, a report goes to the court so indicating, but what did the center really learn about this person's capacity to be with his or her children in ways that are safe for both the children and the former partner? Centers are caught in a safety bind. On the one hand, they are reluctant to loosen their monitoring because it might lead to interchanges with children that are harmful. On the other hand, they recognize that they are sending misleading, even Pollyanna-like reports to the court. While some court representatives asserted that they can interpret "good visit" reports with the history of abuse in mind, in our limited review of files we found examples that confirmed staff fears that abusers who have made little apparent progress in changing their behavior have successfully used the center's reports to argue for unsupervised visits.

The centers saw a need in many cases for ongoing work with domestic violence offenders and victims to learn to co-parent or parallel-parent their children after separation. The centers could play a central role in working with fathers and mothers toward achieving non-violence and safety over the long (20-year) haul. This aspect of center work requires interagency collaboration and support from the advisory councils to help shape that vision.

The following chart grew out of our discussions on safety. It is a planning tool for centers to think about the three phases of safety in each aspect of their work or activities. It is both a document for internal use by a center and for interagency discussions on building safety into the entire community's response to post-separation violence and supervised visitation and exchange.

Building Safety into Collaborations: Enhancing Multi-Agency Interventions	
SAFETY = *Protection of children & victims of battering from continued physical sexual, and emotional harm, coercion, and threats.*	*How do we build safety into interventions by these agencies?*
Safety during the separation process (separation – 2+ years)	▫ Protection Order Court ▫ Juvenile Court (CPS) ▫ Divorce & Custody Court ▫ Criminal Court ▫ **Supervised Visitation Center** ▫ **Batterers' Intervention Program** ▫ Domestic Violence Advocacy Program ▫ Mental Health & Social Service Providers ▫ Medical Services ▫ Law Enforcement Agencies ▫ Other
Safety during the visit or exchange (2 – 8 hours)	
Permanent safety as children are co-parented or parallel parented (0 – 20+ years)	

Center staff recognized a further paradox in their role in that the center's very existence created an opportunity for some violent parents to have access to their children, which would likely be denied if the center was not there to provide security. Centers are also fearful of *not* serving the most violent offenders because courts may nevertheless order visitation or exchange at a neutral space where there is no security or supervision, such as McDonald's. The four communities involved in this assessment face the same questions as those across the country: "When do the courts decide that the harm to a child who is continually drawn into an abuser's web of coercion, control, intimidation, and abuse is a price worth paying for the goal of allowing the parent to exercise parental rights and the child to have an ongoing relationship with a parent?" Such questions need to be openly addressed in order to fully recognize the ethical and protective role of the state and community towards the victims of battering and the perpetrators, who are themselves products of the very communities who now hold them accountable.

3. Beyond ensuring children's safety during visits, the centers struggle with their role in providing services and supports in the context of family members' competing interests.

It was obvious from our observations, interviews, and focus groups that centers have a unique relationship with all family members. Few other people in the community get to know them as do the center staff. Center activities extend almost organically from monitoring visits to helping each member of the family with different aspects of adjusting to a restructuring of their most intimate relationships. Unfortunately, the adjustments occur at the same time that the destructive power dynamics that characterize these relationships have been altered, but not always with a reduction in abuse and danger. Each center has had to think about what it should do for family members, besides facilitating the visit. The relationship they establish with families makes a logical anchor for services that go beyond merely making sure no one gets hurt at the visit. As evident in their mission statements (Attachment H), all of the centers have broader goals than providing safety during a two-hour visit. Below is a list of some of our observation or discussion notes regarding services, activities, and needs of family members that became visible during the assessment week.

- Centers were inconsistent in whether or how they should help children talk to their abusive parent about the abuse.
- Centers tended to be more rigid in their expectations of non-custodial parents. As such, they were not always attentive to hearing from them what they needed. This occurred within a context of a significant number of non-custodial parents attempting to manipulate the centers services for purposes antithetical to the centers mission.
- Centers seemed to be aware of and committed to thinking through how children experience the center, positively or negatively. There was less awareness of how others, and fathers in particular, experience the center.
- Centers did not have access to parenting curricula and material addressing the ways in which abusers undermine children's relationships with their parent who is battered.
- Victims were not adequately linked to an advocacy program, even where the center was located in a domestic violence agency. It was as much a design problem in the advocacy program as it was the center's design.
- In our interviews with advocates we noted that none of their programs were as entrenched in advocacy for battered women around custody and access issues as they were in civil protection order and criminal court advocacy. We also noted that the path to the advocacy program was not directly linked to use of the visitation centers in the way it was linked to the use of the shelter or protection order court or arrest
- Center staff wanted to somehow work with batterers' groups to enhance the center's work with abusers in relationship to post-separation abuse, including the use of children to control their partners.
- Conflicts over control of children continue after separation, such as decisions about which sport to play, when to get a hair cut, or what shirt to wear, and centers are drawn into these power dynamics in obvious and not so obvious ways.
- Centers need to be clear about their role in confronting the harm done by batterers' use of children in post-separation abuse and in how they work with other intervening agencies in that effort, including courts, batterers' programs, advocates, and mental health workers. A plan needs to be negotiated with and connect all of the key intervening agencies in order to achieve some level of consistency in these efforts.
- Centers did not have an easy way to articulate batterers' use of children as a form of abuse, whether to the courts and mental health providers, or even to themselves. The tactics are not readily recognized in the child abuse discourse, are largely missing in how courts understand the dynamics, and typically have not been included in the centers' own staff training.
- Center staff seemed less effective in interacting with male abusers than with children and their mothers.
- In some of the visits we watched and in discussing specific cases with monitors and parents using the centers, we found ourselves posing questions that could always be answered with the preface***, "It depends on what you think your role is."*** Some examples include:
    - How should the visitation center acknowledge and address a child's anger with the non-custodial parent?
    - Should the center assess the battering parent's motivation, accountability, and rehabilitation?
    - Is it the center's role to develop a heightened response to cases where the custodial parent needs assistance to address safety concerns?

- Should the center provide a bridge for communication between parents, and in what situations?
- If a child doesn't want to visit their parent, under what circumstances should the staff try to coax them into trying it for a bit, when should they not do so, and why the difference?

The discussion about services and needs leads us back to the question of the center's role in working with families and the unique needs of mothers, fathers and children. Currently centers are restricted in their ability to use some federal funding for some services, such as therapeutic visits or, in some cases, parenting groups. Nevertheless, centers must still examine and decide what they intend to do with their total funding base and how they will develop services over the long haul.

4. The center's role and relationship to the courts is unclear.

We must keep in mind that in half of domestic violence cases, for a battered woman leaving her abuser, the abusers use of intimidation, coercion and violence does not end. Instead, it shifts the battlefield from the home to the divorce court; it shifts the claims of entitlement from "you are my wife …." to "these are my kids…"; it shifts the sense of betrayal from, "you aren't doing ***this*** *for me" to "you have taken away everything that is important to me." In the cases we are all working with, separation rarely ends abuse, but it does significantly alter the grounds upon which the abuse is done and resisted.* – Ellen Pence, Mt. Pleasant Meeting

As noted earlier in this report, the centers do not have identical mission statements. Two are located in domestic violence agencies and tend to see the protection of battered women as a primary method of protecting their children. One of the centers is located in a mental health agency and identifies its primary role as supporting families in need of assistance. Supervising visits is a relatively new role for the mental health center, particularly in the area of domestic abuse cases. The fourth center is within a child advocacy center, which identifies its primary role as preventing the abuse and neglect of children. Only one center was not required to make significant internal shifts in its practices to meet the objectives of the OVW Safe Havens initiative. The grant requires all four centers, however, to establish a collaborative relationship with its local court system. Given the differences in agency missions, those collaborations may look different from one community to the next, but the assessment pointed out ways that all four centers and their respective court systems need to coordinate their practices to safely serve families in the context of post-separation violence.

Most of the issues we discussed in our interviews with practitioners can be summarized as the need to collectively think through who is gathering what information, for what purposes, and within what interpretive frameworks; and, to examine how this information is shared in order to allow practitioners and the courts to make decisions that are protective and fair to all parties.

All four communities had a level of solid operative relations between centers and the courts. None of them, however, had a comprehensive, safety focused, victim focused, child sensitive, and domestic abuse savvy strategy to help families navigate through separation after abuse.

None of the agencies we met with seemed to have adequate assessment tools to coordinate how workers ask about and interpret the abuse they uncover in their actions on a case. At the same time, there was little interagency coordination of case information. The lack of coordination meant that practitioners at almost every level of intervention were partially informed, either because they did not have access to available information or other practitioners did not gather information when the opportunity presented itself. For example, some of the visitation center staff we interviewed relied on police reports to inform them of the danger or risk in a case. In the few police reports we found in case files, however, we noticed that officers were not required to document the history of abuse nor were they organized to focus any commentary on how the children were involved in the abuse. This information, if built into the infrastructure of the intervening systems' documentary processes, would be extremely useful to Friends of the Court, therapists working with the children and the abusers, center staff, judges at protection order hearings or sentencing hearings, batterer treatment providers and others.

These broader issues of coordination, linkages, and documentation emerged in our assessment because we were exploring the center's role in relation to the court's responsibility to manage post-separation questions of custody and access. If the centers are to involve themselves in trying to ensure safety during the two-plus years following a separation and in the long-term ability of parents to co-parent or parallel parent, then they will inevitably become involved in how the courts piece together a picture of what is happening with a family. We met with highly skilled and trained practitioners. Without a comprehensive system of case documentation, however, even the most skilled worker will be unable to place their piece of the information in a context that produces an accurate reading of who is doing what, to whom, and with what impact.

In each community there was an uneven use of the various court processes to intervene in ways that ensure the least opportunity for further abuse. This was particularly true of the criminal court system, which could actively be employed to place controls on abusers in more ways than simply securing convictions for assault arrests. We found that the criminal courts referred only a handful of cases to the visitation centers, even though more than half of the criminal cases in the current batterer programs involve men with children.

There was no structure in place for a center to articulate to the court what the center needed to effectively work with these families or for the courts to articulate to the centers what it needs to make decisions. Center staff seemed to make assumptions about what the court wanted, or would do if they changed their practices without consulting with the court. We got the impression that while each of the centers had met with the presiding judge or a representative from the bench, there was a lack of a true debate or dialogue on the relationship of the center to the court. At the same time, during the assessment we found ourselves repeatedly engaged in lively discussions with members of the bench about the handling of these cases.

It appeared to the assessment team that a series of discussion about what the centers experience as constraining aspects of court involvement might result in working through a number of problems. For example, each of the centers encountered cases where they believed the use of the center and visitation itself were too dangerous for the children, the staff or one

of the parents. They were reluctant to refuse services, however, because they were afraid that the court, seeing no other alternative as a safe site, would simply order visitation at a public place or exchange at the police department parking lot.

We compiled a list of issues that appeared in the case file review and interviews with judges, Friends of the Court, attorneys representing clients in custody disputes, and center staff. Our goal was not so much to answer these questions, or even propose a method to do so, but to address how they link back to the role of the visitation center.

- Courts send cases to the visitation center without articulating the court's goals for the family.
- There is significant variation in the approach and processes of the Friends of the Court, both across and within districts.
- Centers are unsure of whether and how to refuse cases that they see as too dangerous for visitation, and are sometimes uneasy about making recommendations as to when visits can be unsupervised.
- Center staff and advocates are not fully aware of the court processes they are drawn into by their work.
- There are no guidelines for center staff to use in reporting to various courts on their interactions with families.
- There is a great deal of information available to the court that is not provided to the centers, even though knowing the content of police reports, protection order affidavits, and conditions of probation would help the centers understand the level of danger and violence in the case.
- A generic approach to visitation services dominates the centers' practices and makes it difficult to adjust services to the needs of a specific family.
- Centers are uncertain about what kind of information they want to give the court
- A "clean" local record may lead to a false sense of security or to unjustified disbelief of a survivor's account of violence. To avoid this, the potential gaps in the information collected, and ways of closing those gaps, need to be understood.
- Visitation center staff does not know what records they can ask for and under what circumstances agencies can make files (i.e., police reports, sentencing recommendations, CPS records) partially or fully available to them. A more overarching question is whether it should be the role of the visitation center to gather this information, or whether it should be the role of the referral source.

5. Each of the 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.

The assessment helped us recognize and articulate the specific ways children are harmed in cases where one parent is battering the other. There are certain tactics of abuse that are more prevalent in these cases than in other child abuse cases.

1. Male batterers[7] typically engage in tactics that are intended to undermine children's relationships with their mothers. This ranges from put downs to abduction.

[7] This tactic of control is not well documented with heterosexual women who batter their male partners.

2. Batterers use children in order to manipulate and control their mothers.
3. Some batterers directly harm children (physically or sexually) in order to hurt, punish, and control their victims.
4. Almost all parents have disagreements on aspects of a child's rearing. These disagreements include socialization – "I won't have a son of mine . . ." – and use of discipline, shaming, rewards, food, protectiveness, education, and the many other aspects of children's lives. When one parent is an abuser, however, these disagreements have a very different dynamic, both in terms of how the abuser asserts control and how the victim resists the abuser's child rearing goals or methods.

Based on our interviews and reading of files, it was clear that there are complex problems in figuring out how to account for domestic violence in custody and access issues. As one Friend of the Court stated:

> *Does domestic violence count in the decision about custody? Yes, of course it does, but what level of domestic violence should we be considering? I might have a mother who is an alcoholic, can't provide for her children and a father who has hit her on occasions but is better able to care for the children's daily needs. So for sure the domestic violence is not going to trump all the other cards and be the single factor I consider or the court considers in making decisions about custody. It's not do we consider it, but when and how and at what level*.

Each of the judges, divorce attorneys and Friends of the Court that we interviewed could, when asked, identify at least one troubling case that caused them a sleepless night. That anxiety was usually around, "Did I get it right? Did I put someone in harm's way?" At the same time, we identified cases in the files that on the face of it looked as if the danger posed by the battering was not adequately addressed in the court's decision. It is not realistic to expect that practitioners who occupy very different philosophical spaces will all merge together in some kind of theoretically harmonious approach to these cases. It is realistic, however, to expect that on a state and local level practitioners will engage in discussions that will make visible the different meanings they place on a similar set of factual accounts, and work toward a more common understanding and language.

What does it mean, for example, to use the term "classic domestic violence cases"? We heard this on several occasions during the assessment. If classic means the characteristics that have been presented under the concept of the battered woman syndrome, then visitation monitors and other interveners holding that concept will expect to see a mother who is passive and unable to take care of herself. If she is not passive, but has, as most women do, resisted the violence in a variety of ways, she may not be seen as qualifying for certain support and intervention, such as supervised visitation.

We saw a need for the four sites to draft an ongoing training program that would address all of the agencies intervening in post-separation custody and access cases that involve battering and abuse of one parent by another. At each site we interviewed practitioners who would be excellent trainers in specific areas. For example, a Friend of the Court in one community provided an excellent theoretical, historical and practical overview of the FOC position within the Michigan legal system. An enhanced presentation such as hers would be an excellent and needed foundation for advocates, center staff, batterer treatment providers, and therapists who

write reports to the courts on these cases. We interviewed several attorneys who frequently represent victims of battering and who were incredibly knowledgeable about the implications of visitation center documentary practices for victims of domestic violence in post-separation custody and access cases. While local communities could do much of the training, pooling resources and expertise and linking into state training resources would provide the most comprehensive training package. We looked through our notes and compiled a list of training topics suggested by audit team members and interviewees.

1. Identifying how abusers' tactics shift post separation.
2. Identifying how to distinguish between battering and other forms of domestic violence, (i.e., situational violence, resistance or reactive violence, and pathological violence).
3. Identifying how children are drawn into battering, as opposed to being seen as witnesses or exposed to such violence.
4. Enhancing skills in working with abusers toward a non-violent and non-abusive approach to separation and co-parenting. This might include: improved interviewing skills; strategies for talking with batterers about the impact of their actions and their sense of themselves as victims; techniques for presenting non-abusive ways to negotiate visitation schedules; and, non-colluding approaches to helping batterers in their relationships with their children.
5. Working with victims of abuse to link with advocacy services and articulate concerns and plans related to their own and their children's safety.
6. Enhancing skills in conducting assessments on the pattern and implications of violence, abuse, and coercion in a relationship.
7. Understanding the functions, powers, limitations, and purposes of different court proceedings, particularly in relationship to state intervention in domestic abuse related cases.
8. Improving report writing skills across intervening agencies. For judges, how to craft orders that offer the protection the court intends. For center staff and other agencies that prepare reports for the courts, how to write an objective yet informative report. For the police, how to improve initial investigation reports to document if and how children were drawn into the abuse.
9. Providing instruction and tools on how to conduct assessments that will uncover all aspects of abuse occurring in a family.

6. No organization in the four communities took on the role of coordinating interagency thinking and action to collectively ensure safety for victims of abuse in supervised visitation and exchange cases, though every center saw it as needed.

We found weak systems of accountability in the collective response to these cases. Almost every practitioner and center worker we interviewed articulated problems with some aspect of how cases were managed under the current system, yet there was no vehicle or protocol established to address these concerns. For example, Friends of the Court have no specific protocol for handling domestic violence cases. One office had a guideline that separate interviews should be conducted whenever there is domestic violence, but there was no assessment method to determine if such violence was present and, if it was, to get a sense of the level of abuse occurring. One FOC we interviewed stated that one of the parties would have to specifically disclose abuse to set the practice of separate interviews in motion. Another FOC expressed the opinion that being able to

see the interaction between the two parties was very helpful and he was reluctant to conduct separate interviews unless it was clearly needed to ensure one party's safety. While all of the FOCs we spoke with were aware of the safety practice of separate interviews in domestic violence cases, there was no agreement on what level of violence was necessary to apply this practice. The practice is designed to give a victim of battering a safe place to say what is going on and to express what it is that s\he wants. But domestic violence is not always battering (the use of violence, intimidation, coercion, and other tactics to control a partner), and the practice of separate interviews was designed to account for battering. Should an FOC conduct separate interviews if the domestic violence occurred two years ago when one party slapped the other for calling him or her a name?

One case we reviewed involved a man with three children who had battered his wife and threatened to kill her and the children, as documented in the police reports included in the file. The center staff was deeply concerned about his almost obsessive behavior directed at building a record that would say he was ready for reconciliation with his family. In his file was a letter from a therapist at his chemical dependency program to his wife, in which the therapist reports that she believed he had been actively working on seeing how his behaviors were hurtful to his family and that he was ready for a discussion about his return home.[8] She offers to mediate between the couple. The letter took the center staff aback. Based on their interactions with this father and the history of violence they had pieced together, the center staff felt he was possibly very dangerous to his children and his wife. With no interagency case consultations or agreements on safe practices, the center had no way to question this letter or the therapist's opinions and actions.

In this case, the center staff felt its report to the court only exasperated the potential safety problem because it had a practice of limiting its documentation to observations about how the visits went. After several visits they were asked to provide a report to the court, which because of this practice read that he showed up on time, played well with his children, and attended to their needs. Apart from his behavior at the visits, however, the staff had numerous discussions with him that lead to a sense that he was probably still a danger to his family. Yet the reports to the court could easily be read to imply that just two months after strangling his wife, threatening to kill his children, holding them all hostage, and fighting with the police that he was ready for unsupervised visits. Without a clearer connection between those who work with these cases on a weekly basis and those who make decisions about long-term custody and access issues, workers will engage in practices that produce case outcomes that no one really intended. With few exceptions, the FOCs, the attorneys, and the center staff whom we interviewed felt there was a need for a collaborative effort to coordinate how intervening agencies, including the visitation center, provide information to the court on these families.

The assessment process itself created a dialogue that each advisory body could continue. It was clear from our interviews with center administrators that they welcomed an interagency dialogue about the relationship of their center's activities to the overall community intervention in these cases. At the same time, each center wished to remain an autonomous entity. Therefore we have concluded this report with two lists, one of questions the centers need to answer internally about

[8] At the writing of this report we do not have a copy of this letter to quote. We only have our remembered impression, which was that the writer was dangerously misinformed about the case, the tactics of battering, or both.

their roles and a second covering the tasks that an advisory council might want to consider taking up as the body that seeks to create the conditions in a community for a center to be successful. [9]

What is our role?
Questions for Visitation Centers:

- What is the center's responsibility toward the mother who is being battered?
- Does prioritizing the battered parent's safety conflict with the notion of neutrality between parents?
- How should a center make distinctions between domestic violence and non-domestic violence cases?
- Is it the center's role to make the violence visible?
- How should the activities of a visitation center – i.e., intake, visits, exchanges, parenting classes, counseling – account for and document tactics of battering?
- When should the center coordinate with other service providers and when should it offer a service directly?
- How should the center respond to other service providers who fail to take up the specific needs of children, women, and men coping with separation after battering?
- How should the center acknowledge and address the range of children's concerns, such as anger toward the non-custodial parent, questions about the abuse, and reluctance or refusal to visit their parent?
- Should the center assess the battering parent's motivation, accountability, and rehabilitation?
- Is it the center's role to develop a heightened response to cases where the custodial parent needs assistance to address safety concerns?
- Should the center provide a bridge for communication between parents, and in what situations?
- What is the center's role in reporting non-compliance with court orders and center rules?
- Who does the visitation center work for? Courts? Families?

What is our role?
Questions for Advisory Councils:

- How can the centers and the courts work together to account for violence and the tactics of batterers?
- How do we work toward a more common understanding of and language for violence and abuse in our intervention in post-separation custody and access cases?
- How do we make domestic violence visible in all referral processes?
- How do we build attention in our collective interventions to the specific ways in which batterers abuse children?
- How can we develop a coherent way of asking about safety across all intervening systems?
- How do we build safeguards against the ways in which batterers might use the visitation center to gain increased access or unsupervised visits without a change in abusive behaviors?
- How do we initiate and structure discussions about cases which centers identify as too dangerous for visitation or exchange?
- What strategies do we develop to address violence in the separation period (*2+ years*) and support parents in achieving non-violence and safety over the long haul (*20 years*)?
- How do we pool resources and expertise to provide ongoing training for visitation centers and other interveners in post-separation violence?

The questions go beyond this specific list into broader issues of defining their respective leadership roles in establishing a common philosophy, preventing and repairing the harm done to children, identifying and advocating for culturally appropriate strategies, and building strong community intervention to challenge social supports for battering and minimize the damage to individual victims. Attachment G is a tool produced during the Michigan Safe Havens

[9] Given the very limited amount of time we had to observe and interview, and the narrow focus of our audit on the centers' roles in these cases, we were unable to assess other interventions in these cases.

assessment to assist the visitation centers, their collaborating partners, and advisory councils in defining their respective roles.

Next Steps in Leadership

At this point the Michigan demonstration site partners and their advisory councils no doubt feel that the initial question – *What is the role of a supervised visitation center?* – has left them with more questions than before they began and overwhelmed by what seems like the overly daunting task of sorting, prioritizing, and acting on these role questions. Our exploration and discussion revealed the many expectations of and demands on a visitation center, both court-based and non-court based, that contribute to a visitation center's multiple roles (Attachments A and B).

The Michigan centers' willingness to step back and examine their missions, goals, and the ways in which their work is organized and conducted on a daily basis has led to new insights and suggested tools that will help centers both within the state and across the country build safe and responsive supervised visitation and exchange for families who have experienced domestic violence. This includes further articulation and understanding of the ways in which children are harmed in cases where one parent is battering the other. It includes a fresh understanding of safety in the context of protection from continued harm over three time phases: during supervised visitation or exchange (*2+ hours*), during the process of separation (*2+ years*), and during the subsequent long-term period of ongoing parenting (*20+ years*). Finally, it led to the development of a series of tools for examining the work of a visitation center and how it accounts for domestic violence, builds safety, and sees its role in community intervention. Included in this report as Attachments C-H, these templates provide a framework for ongoing discussion of the center's role and further analysis of the themes that have emerged as a result of the safety assessment.

Under each of the six themes, we found specific suggestions about where the Safe Havens collaboration could begin to move from the point of identification and discussion to action. The recommendations are recapped here in order to assist the project partners in deciding what might be their next steps, both locally and statewide. They are clearly intertwined with the role questions articulated above, but may be useful in selecting and organizing priorities. Each recommendation is listed with the theme where it appears.

- Use the advisory council and/or court collaboration to help resolve conflicting goals for visitation centers (Theme 1).
- Incorporate attention to specific forms of abuse of children by batterers in the community's collective intervention (Theme 1).
- Find a common understanding of the violence and abuse that characterize these post-separation visitation and exchange cases (Theme 1).
- Develop a strategy to deter violence over the period of separation and long term (Theme 2).
- Shape a vision of working with fathers and mothers toward achieving non-violence and safety (Theme 2).
- Negotiate a plan and connect all of the key intervening agencies to achieve consistency in confronting the harm done by batterers to children (Theme 3).
- Hold a series of discussion about what the centers experience as constraining aspects of court involvement in decisions about the dangerousness of visitation (Theme 4).

- Work toward a more common understanding of battering (Theme 5).
- Pool resources and expertise to provide the most complete training package on issues of battering and visitation and exchange (Theme 5).
- Pursue a collaborative effort to coordinate how all intervening agencies provide information to the court (Theme 6).
- Initiate a dialogue about the relation of visitation center activities to overall community intervention in domestic violence (Theme 6).

The assessment brought into clearer view the broad roles of the supervised visitation centers and their domestic violence partners in relationship to the demonstration project's advisory councils.

What is the role of a . . .

Supervised Visitation Center and its Domestic Violence Partner	Safe Havens Advisory Council
▪ Communicate our role in building safety and undoing harm ▪ Provide documentation that is more directly connected to our goals: safety within visit and safety within family ▪ Share leadership	▪ Promote collaboration: As a community, how do we deal with post-separation violence? ▪ Build and support collective action: no one intervener has the complete picture of violence

Our discussions suggested an advisory role centered on collaboration and building community vision, with the practice of supervised visitation and day-to-day operations left to the centers. The advisory group's role is to focus on building permanent safety, while the visitation center's role is concerned with safety during the visit and the period of separation. Together, the task before them is to define their respective leadership roles in the broader scope of community intervention.

Attachments

A) The Many Demands on a Visitation Center: Court-Based Interests

B) The Many Demands on a Visitation Center: Non-Court-Based Interests

C) Building Safety into Collaborations: Enhancing Multi-Agency Interventions

D) Designing a Center to Account for Domestic Violence: What Role Do We Play?

E) Designing a Center to Account for Domestic Violence: Service Activities

F) Designing a Center to Account for Domestic Violence: Administrative Activities

G) Defining the Center's Leadership Role in Community Intervention

H) Michigan Safe Havens Demonstration Site: Visitation Center Missions and Goals

Attachment A

The Many Demands On A Visitation Center: Court-Based Interests				
TYPE OF COURT	**LEGAL FUNCTION**	**WHO CARRIES OUT THAT FUNCTION?**	**WHAT DO THEY WANT FROM VISITATION CENTERS?**	**IMPLICATIONS AND ROLE CONFLICTS**
PROTECTION ORDER	Provide injunctive relief from domestic violence	Family Division (Division of Circuit Court) ▪ Judges ▪ Referees	➢ Ensure safety ➢ Ensure compliance with no-contact provision when visitations/exchanges occur	Only a few judges appear to order supervised visitation in PPO process.
CPS / DEPENDENCY	Protect children from abuse and neglect	Family Division of Circuit Court (a/k/a Probate Court) Child Protection Workers	➢ Ensure safety ➢ Enhance reunification efforts ➢ Provide information that will help courts make decisions about a permanent placement for children	➢ Provide information to courts/PS workers for reunification/termination decision-making when information is of limited value ➢ Therapeutic visitation toward reunification – this could mean an expansion of the role beyond the VC's intentions/abilities ➢ Child in care of state has different needs than child in care of one parent
FAMILY / CUSTODY	Determine the best interest of the child in a dispute over custody of a child Promote the broadest possible access to both parents Safety	Family Division (Division of Circuit Court) ➢ Judges ➢ Referees ➢ Mediators ➢ Case Workers ➢ Evaluators ➢ Parenting Time Coordinators ➢ FOCs	➢ Promote broadest contact with both parents ➢ Serve as an additional set of eyes and ears for the court ➢ Provide neutral setting ➢ Provide therapeutic visitation ➢ Provide information that will move the case toward resolution ➢ Assist in ensuring compliance with the order ➢ Help ensure contact is safe	➢ Broad contact between a batterer and his child may be antithetical to the mission of the organization ➢ VCs must balance need for "neutral" information with need to ensure family is safe (even after visits) ➢ VCs struggle with ensuring a safe, nurturing environment for children with the role of enforcer/evaluator ➢ VCs' reports may have only objective information, but may be viewed from a subjective lens ➢ Some cases may always require that additional measures are needed to ensure safe access
CRIMINAL	Protect public at large from crime (victim is not a party to the action)	➢ District and Circuit Court ➢ Police ➢ Prosecutors ➢ Probation Officers	Emerging issue: Currently, there is not a broad ordering of supervised visitation/exchange by criminal courts. However, some courts do order supervised visitation/exchange as a bond condition or a condition of parole.	Safety Reporting information Enforcement of order

Attachment B

THE MANY DEMANDS ON A VISITATION CENTER: NON-COURT BASED INTERESTS

WHO?	WHAT DO THEY WANT FROM VISITATION CENTER?	IMPLICATIONS AND ROLE CONFLICTS
CHILD / CHILDREN	➢ Physical and emotional safety ➢ Parental/family love & support ➢ Respect for personal autonomy & privacy ➢ Continuity & predictability ➢ Help coping with and processing life events	➢ How does the center identify sources and level of danger? ➢ Can/should the center reject cases where risk is too high? ➢ How should the center challenge court orders it sees as unsafe? ➢ How might rejecting a case increase the vulnerability of a child and non-battering parent? ➢ What should the center do when a child does not want to visit his or her parent?
NON-BATTERING PARENT	➢ Physical and emotional safety ➢ Healthy, loving relationship with child ➢ Support, respect for parental role ➢ Compliance with supervised visitation ➢ Privacy ➢ Fairness ➢ Help processing life changes and events ➢ Help with other community agencies	➢ What does a center need to know in order to support safety of child and non-battering parent? ➢ How can/should the center address the power imbalance between the non-battering and battering parent? ➢ How might sharing information "fairly" compromise safety? ➢ To what extent should the center provide links to other community supports and resources?
BATTERING PARENT	➢ Healthy, loving relationship with child ➢ Support, respect for parental role ➢ Compliance with supervised visitation ➢ Privacy ➢ Fairness ➢ Help processing life changes and events ➢ Help with other community agencies ➢ Disconnect battering behavior from parenting ➢ Acknowledge non-battering parent as deficient ➢ Support for custody claim	➢ How far should the center go in fostering a relationship between a child and his or her battering parent? ➢ To what extent should the center encourage/require/refer battering parents to batterer intervention services? ➢ To what extent should the center encourage/require/refer battering parents to parenting groups? And what kind of parenting group? ➢ How does the center recognize and respond to battering behaviors?
GRANDPARENTS & OTHER RELATIVES	➢ Physical and emotional safety ➢ Maintain family relationships	➢ To what extent will sharing information with other family members promote or compromise safety? ➢ To what extent can other family members be a support for or obstacle to safety? ➢ How do visitation center services, space, and routines affect a child's relationships with other relatives?
GENERAL COMMUNITY	➢ Safety from abuse ➢ Privacy ➢ Accountability for perpetrators ➢ Access to support and services	How does the visitation center safeguard safety and privacy in the face of multiple interests and expectations?
ATTORNEYS	➢ Information about clients ➢ Support for their case ➢ Services for clients ➢ Revenue	
THERAPISTS	➢ Information about clients ➢ Services for clients ➢ Revenue	

Attachment B

WHO?	WHAT DO THEY WANT FROM VISITATION CENTER?	IMPLICATIONS AND ROLE CONFLICTS
LAW ENFORCEMENT	➢ Information about criminal activity ➢ Services that prevent crime ➢ Non-police resource for post-separation access to children	
SCHOOLS	➢ Information relevant to child's safety ➢ Information relevant to child's education	
DV SERVICES AGENCY	➢ Safety for battered parent and child ➢ Information relevant to safety of individuals ➢ Services and options for battered parents and children ➢ Financial stability ➢ Well-trained staff ➢ Understanding of dynamics and tactics of battering	
BATTERER INTERVENTION	➢ Information relevant to safety of battered parent and child ➢ Services and options for batterers ➢ Financial stability	
THE SUPERVISED VISITATION CENTER	➢ Safe space/facilities ➢ Space/facilities that promote parent/child interaction ➢ Well-trained staff ➢ Solid background information about visiting families ➢ Financial stability ➢ Engagement and cooperation from visiting families ➢ Supportive service network for families ➢ Protection against liability	➢ How does the center's design account for: o Batterer tactics and behaviors *in general*? o Batterer tactics and behaviors in *relation to children*? o Batterer use of institutions to abuse? o Adult victim response to abuse? o Children's needs and response to abuse? ➢ What role does the center play in: o Protecting children? o Protecting battered parents from continued abuse? o Improving the relationship of children to parents? o Undoing the harm that domestic violence does to children? o Promoting change in abusers? ➢ How does the center define its role in community intervention?

Attachment C

Building safety into collaborations:
Enhancing multi-agency interventions

…into interventions by these agencies?

How do we build…

SAFETY = Protection of children & victims of battering from continued physical, sexual, and emotional harm, coercion, and threats	Protection Order Court	Juvenile Court (CPS)	Divorce & Custody Court	Criminal Court	Supervised Visitation Center	Domestic Violence Advocacy Programs	Mental Health & Social Service Providers	Medical Services	Law Enforcement Agencies	Other:	Other:
Safety during the separation process *(separation – 2 yrs +)*											
Safety during visits or exchanges *(2 – 8 hours)*											
Permanent safety *(0 – 18+ yrs)*											

Attachment D

Designing a center to account for domestic violence

…*when engaging in these service activities*?

What ROLE do we play in…

											Coordinating work with:				
	Policy Develop.	Procedure Develop.	Site Maint. & Security	Staff Develop.	Staff Supervision & Assignment	Center Evaluation	Funding and Reporting	Problematic Intervention by Another Agency	Enhancing Intervention by Another Agency	Enhancing Interagency Intervention	Family/ Juv/Civil/ Criminal Courts	Human Service Agencies	Law Enforce.	Advocacy Programs	Others:
Protecting children															
Protecting battered women from continued abuse															
Improving the relationship of children to parents															
Undoing the harm that DV does to children															
Other:															
Other:															

Attachment E

Designing a center to account for domestic violence

…when engaging in these service activities?

How do we account for…

	Family Access to Center	Referral to Center	Intake & Orientation	Negotiating Visits & Logistics	Monitoring Exchanges	Monitoring Visits	Security Measures	Info, Referral to Other Services, & Follow-up	Additional Programming	Documenting Cases	Linking to Other Agencies	Reporting to Other Agencies	Evaluating a Family	Closing a Case
Batterer's tactics & behaviors *…in general*														
Batterer's tactics & Behaviors *…in relation to children*														
Batterer's use of institutions to abuse														
Adult victim responses to abuse														
Children's needs and responses to abuse														

Attachment F

Designing a center to account for domestic violence

…when engaging in these administrative activities?

How do we account for…

	Policy Develop.	Procedure Develop.	Site Maint. & Security	Staff Develop.	Staff Supervision & Assignment	Center Evaluation	Funding and Reporting	Problematic Intervention by Another Agency	Enhancing Interve ntio n by Another Agency	Enhancing Interagency Interve ntion	Coordinating work with: Family/ Juv/Civil/ Criminal Courts	Human Service Agencies	Law Enforce.	Advocacy Programs	Others:
Batterer's tactics & behaviors *…in general*															
Batterer's tactics & Behaviors *…in relation to children*															
Batterer's use of institutions to abuse															
Adult victim responses to abuse															
Children's needs and responses to abuse															

Attachment G

DEFINING THE CENTER'S LEADERSHIP ROLE IN COMMUNITY INTERVENTION

Your Role

____ MDVPTB ____ State Court Administrators Office ____ Supervised Visitation Center ____ Domestic Violence Center/Coalition ____ Judges ____ Friend of the Court ____ Batterer's Intervention Program ____ Fatherhood Program ____ Divorce Attorney ____ Children Protective Services	**Leadership** 1. Call people together. 2. Access quality of community interventions 3. Seek out best practices 4. Organize discussions 5. Proposed solutions 6. Advocate for solutions 7. Troubleshoot	**Participatory** 1. Attend meetings and provide perspective of agency 2. Consider proposals 3. Attend trainings 4. Lend support to leadership 5. Refer to other agencies & follow up with family	**Marginal** 1. Primarily a referral role 2. (Active role not appropriate because of a conflict or because objective is not part of our mission.)
Establish and understand the big picture – who is doing what to whom, and with what impact?			
Establish a common philosophy - Shifting the role of controlling abuser from victim to community			
Prevent and repair the harm done to children			
Prevent and repair the harm done to victims of domestic violence/women			
Advocate for and identify culturally appropriate strategies in facilitating supervised visitation and exchange services and in ensuring that other services also make such strategies available throughout the community			
Advocate for the elimination of racial, ethnic and gender bias in the judicial system			
Improve the relationship between children and their parents, as well as, their ability to parent			
Organize and facilitate multidisciplinary trainings specifically on the intersection of domestic violence, child custody and supervised visitation and safe exchanges			
Increase community awareness around the need for and services available for supervised visitation and exchange, as well as other related services			
Clarify and coordinate the flow of information, as appropriate, between community partners			
Organize and coordinate a coordinated community response			
Advocate for systems change			
Other:			

Attachment H

Michigan Safe Havens Demonstration Site: Visitation and Exchange Centers' Missions and Goals				
	Child & Family Services Traverse City[i]	**Child & Parent Center Jackson**	**Every Woman's Place Muskegon**	**HAVEN Pontiac**
Mission Statement: Parent Organization	(Child & Family Services of Northwestern Michigan) Promote the safety and well being of children, adults, and families by providing services that foster and develop social and emotional healing and growth.	(The Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse & Neglect) *"To strengthen families and reduce the risk of child abuse and neglect".*	The Mission of Every Woman's Place is to improve and enhance the lives of women and families in crisis in our community by providing and advocating for services which lead to their safety, their emotional and economic self-sufficiency, their productivity, and their ability to participate fully in our society.[ii]	(HAVEN) To eliminate domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse through treatment and prevention services across Oakland County.
Mission Statement: Visitation Center	Safe Haven Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Program seeks to promote the safety and security, and human dignity of families who have experienced domestic violence and by utilizing our services, it is our hope families will feel secure and strive towards growth and understanding.	(Supervised Parenting Time) *"To address the obstacles to reunification of non-custodial parents and their minor children through the provision of child-driven services in a safe and neutral environment, emphasizing the parent and child relationship."*	The mission of the (Muskegon County) Safe Haven Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange program is to facilitate opportunities for children who have experienced domestic violence in their family to have safe and conflict-free visits with their non-custodial parent, to ensure a measure of safety for their mothers who often are the victims of domestic violence, and encourage a child friendly, family nurturing environment staffed with competent providers.	(Supervised Parenting Time) To provide parenting time opportunities to non-custodial parties while seeking to ensure the safety of all those involved.[iii]
Goals for Family Members	A. Children: Reduce the trauma and anxiety to children of abusers who are afraid that they, or the non-abusive parent will be hurt or threatened during any contact with the abusive parent. Eliminate the risk that children	• Children: *"to help children establish or re-establish relationships with their non –custodial parent in a safe, neutral environment. Reduce trauma and anxiety to children of batterers who*	Goals of SVC with individual clients who use the facility: • To offer a conflict free, non-judgmental visitation environment for children, mothers and fathers who have been ordered to our services.	Goals for all family members include safety, increased parenting time options, and when appropriate, improved relationship between the child(ren) and visiting party.[iv]

Attachment H

Michigan Safe Havens Demonstration Site: Visitation and Exchange Centers' Missions and Goals				
	Child & Family Services Traverse City[i]	**Child & Parent Center Jackson**	**Every Woman's Place Muskegon**	**HAVEN Pontiac**
	will be physically, or sexually abused and/or abducted during supervised visitation Reduce the risk of emotional abuse during supervised visitation. B. Victim: Reduce the trauma and anxiety that they will be hurt or threatened during any contact with the abusive parent. C. Abuser: Create an opportunity for them to spend time with their child(ren) in a safe environment. D. Extended Family: Create an opportunity to spend time with their family members. (This is a topic that we need to discuss in more detail. We are however, in agreement that this service needs to be offered to tribal families. Concerns have been raised regarding issues of background checks for extended family)	*have a conflicting desires both to see and to avoid seeing the battering parent. Substantially reduce the risk that children will be emotionally abused during visitation with a battering parent"* • Mother: (custodial parent) "*to provide safe, affordable, age-appropriate and activity-appropriate means of affording parenting time to the abusive, non-custodial parent. Improve the safety and well-being of adult survivors"* • Father: (non-custodial parent) "*allow abusive, non-custodial parents an opportunity to spend time with their children in a structured, safe setting"* • Extended Family: *"a visit which is scheduled during the week before or after the child's birthday may be attended by the immediate extended family (i.e. grandparents) at the discretion of* the Program Coordinator"	• To be a source of referral to community programs as needed, i.e. parenting groups, individual counseling, group counseling, or other programs as recognized. Children – provide a safe, conflict-free environment for visit with NCP Promote child/parent relationship Mother – provide a safe, conflict-free environment for child to visit with NCP Provide a place where there need be no interaction with NCP **Father** - provide conflict-free environment for visit with child(ren) Promote parent/child relationship Extended family – promote healthy family relationships	

Attachment H

Michigan Safe Havens Demonstration Site: Visitation and Exchange Centers' Missions and Goals				
	Child & Family Services Traverse City[i]	**Child & Parent Center Jackson**	**Every Woman's Place Muskegon**	**HAVEN Pontiac**
Community Goals	• Educate court officials and service providers about domestic violence. • Educate court officials and service providers about the issues involved in custody cases where there has been a history of domestic violence. • The court will consider the child's interests before all others	The Center continues to build and maintain relationships in the community with the courts, the Aware shelter, the SMILE program (Start Making It Livable for Everyone), FIA, counselors, etc. to always consider what is best for the child. The continuing community goal is to protect children.	• Court and FOC to recognize acknowledge and act upon need to protect victims of domestic violence and their children from continued abuse from batterers after separation and/or divorce • To continue to act as facilitator/convener for issues involving safety of victims of domestic violence and their children	Not really defined but my hope as the program director is that parenting will be seen as a privilege and not a right, and good healthy relationships are supported and toxic ones are discouraged.

[i] (Traverse City) For the past several years the Women's Resource Center has been the leader in our community in promoting systems change and educating court officials and service providers about the dynamics of domestic violence. Child & Family Services will now play a more active role in promoting systems change and educating the community. We see the leadership being split between our agency, the Women's Resource Center, community service providers and individuals.

[ii] Purpose statements for programs of Every Woman's Place:

Purpose Statement: Crisis Center
The purpose of the Crisis Center is to provide victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other life crises safe temporary shelter, counseling, legal and social advocacy, and information and referral services by caring persons sensitive to women's concerns.
Additionally, the Crisis Center will increase community awareness and supportive, positive response to the victimization of women and children in Muskegon County. The Crisis Center will assist women with their ability to make independent decisions and to enhance their opportunity to live violence-free lives.

Purpose Statement: Employment and Training Services
The purpose of Employment and Training Services is to assist the community utilizing a holistic approach to unblock the barriers hindering a client from obtaining and retaining employment and/or training.

Purpose Statement: Webster House
The purpose of Webster House is to provide a safe alternative shelter for youth in crisis and reunite and/or strengthen families through individual and family counseling, outreach, advocacy, referrals for medical/legal/mental health assistance and follow-up services.

Purpose Statement: Prevention Program
The purpose of the Prevention Program is to assist people in acquiring the skills that will help them resist alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

[iii] HAVEN: (We are not sure we have really defined this, but it's on our material)
[iv] HAVEN: (Again, it's not defined anywhere on paper, but it reflects the general feel of the program)