


BUILDING *safety* REPAIRING *harm*

*Lessons and Discoveries from the
Office on Violence Against Women's*

SAFE HAVENS: SUPERVISED VISITATION
AND SAFE EXCHANGE GRANT PROGRAM
—DEMONSTRATION INITIATIVE



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GRANT PROGRAM –
DEMONSTRATION INITIATIVE

This initiative was a collaborative effort of the Office on Violence Against Women, the four demonstration sites, and the national technical assistance partners, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and Praxis International.

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STATE OF MICHIGAN

(JACKSON, GRAND TRAVERSE, ANTRIM, LEE LANAU, MUSKEGON, AND OAKLAND COUNTIES)

- Shelia Hankins (local project director) and Mary Lovik (project legal consultant)
- Visitation Centers: Child and Parent Center and the Council for Prevention of Child Abuse (Jackson), Child and Family Services of Northwest Michigan (Traverse City), Every Woman's Place Safe Haven Center (Muskegon), and HAVEN (Pontiac)
- Domestic Violence Victim Services: Michigan Coalition Against Domestic And Sexual Violence, AWARE (Jackson), Women's Resource Center of Grand Traverse, Every Woman's Place, HAVEN, and Underground Railroad (Saginaw)
- Courts: State Court Administrative Office, Friend of the Court Bureau; Muskegon County Family Court; Friend of the Court Offices in Jackson, Pontiac, and Traverse City

SANTA CLARA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

- Beth McNamara and Jennifer Rose (local project directors)
- Visitation Centers: Walnut Avenue Women's Center, Safe Connections for Kids of Santa Cruz County, Family Service Agency of San Mateo County, Family Visitation Center, and Community Solutions, Family Access Program of Santa Clara County
- Domestic Violence Victim Services: Walnut Avenue Women's Center, C.O.R.A of San Mateo County, and Next Door Solutions to Domestic Violence of Santa Clara County
- Courts: The Superior Court and Family Court Services Division of Santa Cruz County, San Mateo County, Santa Clara County and, Santa Clara County Office of the County Counsel

CITY OF CHICAGO

- Beth Chaplin, Leslie Landis, and Emily Muskovitz (local project directors)
- Visitation Centers: Apna Ghar, The Branch Family Institute, and Mujeres Latinas en Acción
- Domestic Violence Victim Services: Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women's Network; Life Span domestic violence legal services program
- Courts: Cook County Circuit Court Domestic Relations Division; Cook County Court Marriage and Family Counseling Services

CITY OF KENT, WASHINGTON

- Tracee Parker (local project director)
- Visitation Center: Safe Havens Visitation Center
- Domestic Violence Victim Services: King County Coalition Against Domestic Violence, YWCA of South King County, and Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- Courts: King County Superior Court United Family Court and Family Court Services

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Introduction

“As she tried to escape, he caught her in the hallway of the apartment building and continued to beat her as her three children watched.”

Follow the news in any community and it is too easy to find stories that read much like the following.

[1] His first punch pushed her across the room, from the doorway to the bed. He jumped on top of her and repeatedly hit her in the face. She screamed for her oldest son to call the police. As she tried to escape, he caught her in the hallway of the apartment building and continued to beat her as her three children watched. She ran from the building, but could not get free; he continued punching her in the neck and face until he knocked her unconscious. A hospital worker discovered that a knife blade had lodged in her neck. The handle had broken off under the blows.

[2] When she told her husband that she would be filing for divorce, he threw her against the wall, hit her over and over again in the face, repeatedly banged her head on the floor, and pressed his hands around her neck until she went limp. He covered her with a blanket and went to sleep. The next day he told the children their mother was resting and got them ready for school, ran errands, and had lunch with a friend.

[3] She went to his house to pick up their two young children, who had been visiting their father as required by the joint-custody order. Ordinarily, she would wait outside for the children to come to the door. He told her that the children were playing a game and wanted her to come in the house. Once inside, he hit her repeatedly with a baseball bat, tied her hands with duct tape, and put her in the back of his truck. He drove to a storage locker where he stuffed her in a garbage can, taped the can shut, covered it with boxes, and left, locking the door behind him. It was winter, the temperature below freezing.

Battering describes a pattern of physical, sexual, and emotional violence, intimidation, and coercion used to establish or maintain control over an intimate partner. While a wide range of behavior is often lumped under the category of “domestic violence,” battering is distinctive for the variety of coercive tactics used by batterers and the level of fear it produces for adult victims and their children, as well as its potential lethality. The woman in the second story did not survive, although it was largely luck and timing that left the other women alive. Most

battering does not end in homicide and these examples may seem extreme, but varying degrees of this kind of physical violence and a wide range of threats and assaults that stop short of injury are commonplace in the lives of adult victims of battering.¹ Many children live with their fathers' mistreatment of their mothers in these ways, reinforced by degrading language and threats to abduct or injure the children. For every act of violence or abuse that makes it to police attention or the evening news, there are countless others in the background that sometimes come to the attention of family members, friends, a domestic violence crisis line, or social service agency, but more often remain invisible. There are also many tactics of abuse that are not so obvious to anyone other than those who are the targets, but can nevertheless be extremely damaging and corrosive to the well-being and safety of victims and their children. For example: repeated accusations of cheating, restricting access to income and other resources, enforcing harsh household rules, being constantly critical and disrespectful, and threatening to take the children. The threat or reality of overt physical violence reinforces the effect of these more subtle tactics of battering, but women who have lived with the experience day-to-day often describe it as worse than being hit because it is unrelenting and wears down a woman's physical, emotional, and financial reserves.

These brief stories only hint at the challenges and struggles that each woman experienced in trying to escape a battering relationship. This monograph begins with their stories as a reminder of those realities and complexities, and that it is risky to assume that leaving such a relationship necessarily ends the violence and coercion. It also begins with their stories to remind readers that families with similar experiences walk through the doors of visitation centers every day.²

The Safe Havens: Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant Program (Supervised Visitation Program), established by the Violence Against Women Act of 2000 and administered by the U.S. Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women (OVW), has provided an opportunity for communities to support supervised visitation and safe exchange that addresses "domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse and/or stalking." It recognizes that the process of separating from and leaving an abusive partner can increase rather than diminish danger for victims of battering and their children. It recognizes that batterers often use visitation and exchange of children as an opportunity to inflict additional emotional, physical, and sexual abuse.

1. For a discussion of the distinction between battering and other acts of domestic violence, see Ellen Pence and Shamita Das Dasgupta, *Reexamining 'Battering': Are All Acts of Violence Against Intimate Partners the Same?* (2006), available through Praxis International, www.praxisinternational.org. Of particular importance for supervised visitation and exchange is the discussion of battering in Lundy Bancroft and Jay G. Silverman, *The Batterer As Parent: Addressing the Impact of Domestic Violence on Family Dynamics* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2002). This monograph generally refers to adult victims of battering as women or mothers and to batterers as men or fathers. In this the authors concurs with Bancroft and Silverman: "We find this gender ascription to be accurate for most cases in which a professional is required to evaluate a batterer's parenting, and it is reflected both in our clinical experience and in most published research... our gendered language does not apply to lesbian and gay male relationships, but recent literature addressing the prevalence, causes, and dynamics of same-sex domestic violence suggests considerable parallel to heterosexual battering... but professionals should be aware of their need for further education about the particular dynamics of domestic violence in these communities..." (4).

2. "Visitation center" and "supervised visitation and exchange" are used throughout this paper as shorthand for supervised visitation and safe exchange programs.


The Supervised Visitation Program encourages understanding of the ways in which coercion and control underpin domestic violence. It requires that the services provided through its grants reflect an understanding of the dynamics of battering and other forms of domestic violence, the impact of such violence and abusive tactics on children, and the importance of holding abusers accountable for their actions.³ It links supervised visitation and exchange with a wider community response by requiring the grantee, which is the governmental entity, to include courts and domestic violence service providers as partners in their projects. Through conferences, forums, and audio trainings, grantees have participated in wide-ranging discussions about how to build supervised visitation and exchange services that focus on the safety of adult victims of battering, as well as their children. This collective work has encouraged a new understanding of supervised visitation and safe exchange as critical post-separation services for battered women and their children. It has also provided an opportunity to expand understanding of the ongoing contact that occurs over time between parents when domestic violence is involved, even when their relationship as partners has ended.

As part of the Supervised Visitation Program, OVW developed and implemented a multi-year Demonstration Initiative to examine promising practices and take a sustained look at supervised visitation and safe exchange in the context of battering and other forms of domestic violence. It selected four demonstration sites to carry out this work: Santa Clara County, California; the City of Chicago, Illinois; the City of Kent, Washington; and, the State of Michigan.⁴ Each demonstration site involved a local collaboration between one or more supervised visitation programs, domestic violence advocacy programs, and the courts. Each grantee established a local consulting committee that included representatives from the collaborating agencies and other sectors involved in building a community response to domestic violence, such as health care, law enforcement, child welfare, education, batterer intervention services, and family law attorneys. Each site examined and implemented new practices, established new partnerships, addressed aspects of cultural accessibility, paid close attention to security, and grappled with sustainability.

Similar exploration and discussion occurred at a national level. Along with the demonstration sites, OVW and the initiative's technical assistance partners, Praxis International and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and the Supervised Visitation Program National Steering Committee launched a dynamic, spirited discussion

3. U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women, *Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant Program – Program Brief*, www.ovw.usdoj.gov/safehaven_desc.htm (2002).

4. The grantees were units of government (local or state).



of how to design and sustain supervised visitation and safe exchange programs that account for battering and other forms of domestic violence. This collective work included discussions of role, safety, accounting for culture and identity, and access to services. It led to new approaches to aspects of visitation practices, including: welcoming and introducing family members to services, documenting and reporting, and advocacy and community collaboration.

These discussions contributed to the broader work and vision of the Supervised Visitation Program, including a critical examination of the assumption of neutrality and its impact on safety for adult victims of battering; new perspectives on center practices such as how people are introduced to services, safety planning, documentation, and reporting; and, development of a set of guiding principles to help communities establish, shape, and sustain visitation and exchange services that support safety for adult and child victims of domestic violence.





Shifting perspectives and practices

“ *That was a crazy amount of work we did in the past four years!* ”

— A visitation center director and Demonstration Initiative project director

Between November 2002 and June 2007, OVW, the Demonstration Initiative grantees, participating visitation programs, local community partners, and the national technical assistance partners met many times in many forums to examine and debate all aspects of supervised visitation thinking and practices. The forums included project directors' meetings, audio conference discussions, all sites' meetings (with centers, courts, advocacy partners, and grantees), and think tank sessions. The topics included the Praxis Safety and Accountability Audit (Safety Audit) methodology; implementation plans; beliefs, values, and philosophy; leadership; collaboration; assessing safety from a child's perspective; defining and incorporating safety in the context of battering and domestic violence; strategies for using consulting committees; cultural accessibility; physical security; observing and monitoring visits; intake and orientation; partnerships with battered women's advocacy programs; safety check-ins; confidentiality and information sharing; practices that centralize safety; and, relationships with the courts.⁵

This section reviews many of the key questions and shifts in thinking that emerged from this collective work across the demonstration sites. While highlighted individually, they are not separate or distinct discussions, but very much intertwined.

5. The Praxis Safety & Accountability Audit is a tool for exploring and analyzing institutional responses to domestic violence. This approach, developed by Praxis International, uses a multidisciplinary team to examine how workers within agencies and systems are organized and coordinated to act on cases. Each demonstration site used the various methods of the Praxis Safety and Accountability Audit – focus groups, individual interviews, observations, and text analysis – to gather information and make sense of how visitation and safe exchange was organized and coordinated in the context of their specific question. Reports from each of the demonstration site's safety audit are available at www.praxisinternational.org.

equal regard



“ *The principle of equal regard for the safety of children and adult victims of battering is at the core of the new perspective represented by the Supervised Visitation Program.* ”



Equal Regard

Supervised visitation and exchange have been occurring for years in both formal and informal settings, from fast-food restaurant parking lots to spaces designed for that specific purpose. Aunts, grandparents, and supportive friends have long played important roles in trying to limit and supervise a parent's access to his or her children when there were concerns about a child's safety. Friends and family have often played a role in trying to secure a safe place for a mother who was being battered, including situations involving visits or exchanges of children, even at direct danger to themselves.

As child abuse and neglect received increased public and governmental attention, more formal arrangements emerged, including specific services, facilities, and visitation "centers." Supervised visitation and exchange developed as a way to provide state oversight of parents who had been deemed abusive or neglectful. This child abuse orientation emphasized reunification, parenting skills, children's safety during visits, and individual and family psychotherapy.

When concern about risk to a child emerged during a divorce or parental separation, such as through questions about child sexual abuse or a parent's drug use or mental health, supervised visitation programs expanded their response. In what were often described as cases of "high conflict" divorce or disputed custody, visitation programs emphasized their role as providing a neutral, professional service to assist in main-

taining parental access to children. They provided a secure facility for potentially dangerous situations and often provided reports to referring courts on the outcome of services.

The Supervised Visitation Program questioned the suitability of these two predominant perspectives – child abuse and divorce-related parental fitness and access to children – in accounting for the realities of battering and the needs of adult victims who were trying to separate from and leave abusive relationships. It questioned the standpoint of neutrality when adult victims of battering had been subjected to the kinds of violence and coercion described in the opening stories. When couples separate in the midst of significant violence and intimidation by one parent against the other, it is inaccurate to characterize them as located on the same plane of “high conflict,” which implies mutual roles and comparable positions and power in the relationship. Such an assumption shifts attention from the danger posed by the deliberate actions of an abusive adult to his partner and their children to the tensions present in a relationship that is ending or changing radically. Children may require protection from the tensions involved in ending a marriage or relationship between their parents, but in cases of domestic violence both the children and the victim require protection from ongoing exposure to abuse. The principle of **equal regard** for the safety of children and adult victims of battering is at the core of the new perspective represented by the Supervised Visitation Program.⁶

The centers participating in the Demonstration Initiative did not begin with a full understanding of the safety implication for battered women in the prevailing practice of supervised visitation. “We wanted to keep people safe, but none of us really understood what we were getting into,” was how one project director described their starting point. A clear, articulated purpose of keeping battered women and their children safe was the most significant shift in perspective and practice that resulted from their work together and across the Supervised Visitation Program.

Early on in the Demonstration Initiative, some centers saw supervised visitation as essentially an arm of the court, existing primarily to uphold its orders. “We’re here for the children” was also a common statement describing a center’s role, along with “safe access” of children to parents they would otherwise not see. The safety of victims of battering was largely invisible and unexplored, and the subtleties of battering behavior went unrecognized. One center director described these early assumptions in this way: “Centers assumed that having two

6. U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women, *Guiding Principles – Safe Havens: Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant Program*, www.ovw.usdoj.gov/docs/guiding-principles032608.pdf (2007).

entrances and two waiting rooms was all they needed. There was this misperception that batterers were going to go up and choke the kids or wallop the staff during the visit.” What went missing was a more purposeful conversation about who was at risk from whom, and in what ways. There was fragmented attention to the everyday ways in which a batterer might try to use visitation and the center in an ongoing effort to dominate and control his partner, whether by constantly shifting the visitation schedule, maneuvering the center to produce good conduct reports, or pushing for less restricted access.

Out of their many debates and discussions, the Demonstration Initiative partners recognized that consideration of safety for adult victims of battering got lost under the prevailing notion of neutrality in supervised visitation.⁷ If a center’s role was to account for domestic violence and protect its victims, however, it had to determine who needed protection from whom and in what ways. A center could provide a valuable neutral *space* for parents to exchange children or visit, and would not represent either parent in court, but if it was to protect the vulnerable from the more powerful it could not stand aside from the ongoing coercion and control that characterize battering, or remain indifferent to the larger context of violence and abuse that brought a family to its door. It was legitimate for visitation centers to provide an atmosphere and an environment to promote change.

In their many discussions about what needed to be in place to pay equal regard to safety and protection of adult victims, the demonstration site participants were clear that the center’s role was not to directly challenge batterers’ beliefs and actions, but to contribute to the wider community response by establishing an atmosphere that limits the opportunity and the inclination to harm. As one program director put it, “we are accounting for the violence, not holding him accountable.” The visitation center’s challenge to battering comes via its message and model of relationships characterized by respect, communication, and nonviolence, as well as its participation in the local coordinated community response to end violence against women. The direct accountability comes via courts and batterer intervention programs.



7. A more complete and detailed examination of neutrality is included in Martha McMahon and Ellen Pence, *On Safety's Side: Protecting Those Vulnerable to Violence – Challenges to Notions of Neutrality in Supervised Visitation Centers* (2008), www.praxisinternational.org.

In reflecting on the shift to equal regard for the safety of adult victims of battering, the demonstration sites identified the following factors as contributing to the change in perspective:

- [1] involving battered women’s advocates in the collaboration;
- [2] the analysis of practice, the “tearing apart and dissecting it,” sparked by the Safety Audits; and,
- [3] the cross-site work of the Demonstration Initiative and other Supervised Visitation Program partners and grantees which “allowed us time to think things through, challenge how we were doing supervised visitation and exchange, suggest new ways of doing it, and trying it out.”

The significance of the principle of equal regard cannot be understated. A commitment to equal regard for the safety of children *and* adult victims of battering opens all center practices to reconsideration: how people are welcomed and introduced to visitation services, what gets documented and recorded, how center records will be used, how a center links adult victims with advocacy, and the visitation center’s role in the wider community response to domestic violence. Equal regard acknowledges that safety of the adult victim is an essential and inherent part of addressing the safety and long-term well-being of the children.

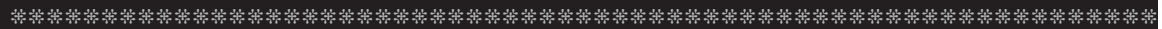


Lessons and Discoveries from the Supervised Visitation Program Demonstration Initiative

introduction

safety over time

“2 hours – 2 years – 20 years”



“ *This new role of contributing to safety over time required changing rules, policies, documentation, training, linkages, mission, and purpose.* ”



Safety Over Time “2 hours – 2 years – 20 years”

The recognition that visitation centers were typically organized to have one type of visit, regardless of the reason for supervised visitation (e.g., risk to a child because of a parent’s alcoholism or the danger that one parent posed to another) was pivotal in the demonstration sites’ discussions and shifting perspectives about safety over time.

The early discussions tended to focus on the immediate experience of visitation: on what happens within the one or more hours during which children and adults arrive, stay in, and leave the center. The centers were largely well-organized to address safety in this immediate context and their practices looked very much the same from city to city and state to state. Their staff paid attention to who was coming and going where and how; they emphasized rules about such behavior as “being within visual sight and sound of the supervising monitor at all times” and “no whispering, passing notes, hand signals, or body signals with the child(ren).” Centers 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.

As conversations within and across the demonstration sites and their Supervised Visitation Program partners continued, a wider notion of safety unfolded that took into account the dangers of post-separation violence and the reality of an ongoing relationship between parents around the lives of their children. This was safety as the protection of children and victims of battering from continued physical, sexual, and emotional harm, coercion, and threats over three distinct time periods:

- [1] Safety during the exchange or actual visit (2+ hours)⁸
- [2] Safety during the two years following a separation (2+ years)
- [3] Safety on a permanent basis (20+ years)

Across all sites visitation practices had been shaped almost exclusively by attention to safety during that “2+ hours” when parents and children are physically present in the facility. As the Demonstration Initiative paid more attention to safety in the context of battering, the partners recognized that centers could be more active during the volatile period of separation.⁹ Centers could contribute to reducing harm and reducing the ways or frequency with which victims and their children are hurt, traumatized, abducted, beaten, and killed. As one partner summed up this more active role, “all of us together, our goal is to help him get through that time doing the least amount of harm to his former partner and children as possible; and, get battered women and children through that period with the least amount of trauma and harm as possible.” Centers could also play a role in working with fathers and mothers toward achieving nonviolence and safety over the span of time beyond separation, based on their ongoing respective roles as parents to their children.

This new role of contributing to safety over time required changing rules, policies, documentation, training, linkages, mission, and purpose. From discussions initiated by the Michigan demonstration site, a framework emerged for thinking about these changes. It led to a series of planning tools that would help guide centers in thinking about the three phases of safety in each aspect of their work, as well as contribute to interagency discussions on building safety into the broader community response to post-separation violence, and the place of supervised visitation in that response.

The demonstration sites’ many discussions about safety in the context of battering and supervised visitation also raised consideration of

8. These are not precise periods of time, but symbolic.

9. The process of separation can be 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 (Ruth E. Fleury, Cris M. Sullivan, and Deborah I. Bybee. 2000. *When Ending the Relationship Does Not End the Violence. Violence Against Women* 6, No.12; work of Jacquelyn Campbell, Carolyn Rebecca Block and others. 2003. *Intimate Partner Homicide. NJ Journal* 250). Some post-separation safety factors are particularly relevant to the work of a visitation center: (1) the likelihood of an abuser shifting control tactics to use of children increases greatly after separation; (2) 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; and, (3) 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,

the multiple dimensions of safety, particularly in looking beyond that immediate two hours of a visit or exchange. People’s lives are complex and the factors that reinforce or diminish risk and safety are also complex. How supervised visitation or exchange can best work for those in need of protection involves understanding not only the danger that an individual batterer poses to a victim, but how immediate life circumstances, aspects of culture, and institutional response also contribute to risk.

One planning tool posed questions about the specific consideration of safety into the work of a visitation center and other intervening agencies.

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 well do we build safety into interventions by these agencies?

[2 + HOURS]
SAFETY DURING A VISIT OR EXCHANGE

[2 + YEARS]
SAFETY DURING THE PROCESS OF SEPARATION

[20 + YEARS] **PERMANENT SAFETY DURING CO-PARENTING OR PARALLEL PARENTING CHILDREN**

- Protection Order Court
- Juvenile Court (CPS)
- Divorce & Custody Court
- Criminal Court
- Supervised Visitation Center
- Domestic Violence Advocacy Program
- Mental Health & Social Service Providers
- Medical Services
- Law Enforcement Agencies
- Other

A second tool posed questions about accounting for battering in the service activities of a visitation center, or those aspects of center practice related to its daily activities and relationships between the center and the families using those services.

DESIGNING A CENTER TO ACCOUNT FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

How do we account for...

...in these service activities?

**BATTERER’S TACTICS & BEHAVIORS
...IN GENERAL**

**BATTERER’S TACTICS & BEHAVIORS
...IN RELATION TO THE CHILDREN**

**BATTERER’S USE OF INSTITUTIONS
TO ABUSE**

ADULT VICTIM RESPONSE TO ABUSE

**CHILDREN’S NEEDS & RESPONSE
TO ABUSE**

- Family access to center
- Referral to center
- Intake & orientation
- Negotiating visits & logistics
- Monitoring visits
- Security measures
- Information, referral, & follow-up
- Additional programming
- Documenting cases
- Linking & reporting to other agencies
- Evaluating a family
- Closing a case
- Other...

A third tool posed questions about accounting for battering in the administrative activities that shape the overall operation of a center and its relationships with other community institutions.

DESIGNING A CENTER TO ACCOUNT FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

<i>What role do we play in...</i>	<i>...through these administrative activities</i>
PROTECTING CHILDREN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy development • Procedure development • Site maintenance & security • Staff development • Staff supervision & assignments • Coordinating work with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Family/juvenile/civil/criminal courts</i> • <i>Human service agencies</i> • <i>Law enforcement</i> • <i>Advocacy programs</i> • <i>Other</i> • Problematic intervention by another agency • Enhancing interagency interventions • Center evaluation • Fundraising and reporting • Other...
PROTECTING BATTERED WOMEN FROM CONTINUED ABUSE	
IMPROVING THE RELATIONSHIP OF CHILDREN TO PARENTS	
UNDOING THE HARM THAT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DOES TO CHILDREN	
PROMOTING CHANGE IN ABUSERS	
OTHER:	

Figure 1, opposite, which grounded and reflected the explorations of the Santa Clara County demonstration site, in particular, provides a graphic representation of the complexity of risk and safety, and another tool for centers to use in reconsidering the ways in which they approach safety over time.

The Demonstration Initiative partners repeatedly spoke about the shift in recognizing the extent to which they were actually involved with what was going on within each family and, by extension, actually involved in their ongoing safety. Whether, how, and when a center responded to the variety and subtleties of battering behavior had an impact. The example of Gina and Harold found on page 20 was offered by a program director to illustrate this reality. It introduced a discussion about the ease with which a center can be drawn in to reinforce battering, the difficulties in shaping a response, and the necessity to prepare staff with a certain level of skill and understanding.

Immediate circumstances & aspects of culture influence the nature, availability, & impact of institutional response

Fig. 1
risks for battered women and their children

Immediate circumstances may increase vulnerability & may be used by batterer to control

Aspects of culture can increase safety, but can also increase vulnerability & may be used by batterer to control

Institution-generated risks reinforce batterer risks



ASPECTS OF CULTURE AND IDENTITY	IMMEDIATE CIRCUMSTANCES	INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE	BATTERER RISKS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Race • Nationality • Cultural norms and standards • Childhood socialization • Community practices • Language • Class • Religion • Other: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immigration status • Income • Professional or social position • Limited English proficiency • Disability • Mental illness • Alcohol/drug use • Rural isolation • Other: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forcing women into divorce mediation • Ignoring violence in custody issues • Unsupervised visitation • Supervised visitation • Joint parenting groups • Coercing victim to get OFP • Damaging relationship with children • Other: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical Violence • Sexual Violence • Psychological cruelty and manipulation • Using children to control • Undermining mother's parenting • Threatening to interfere with custody • Abduction • Using institutions (i.e., police, CPS, Visitation Center) to control • Exposure to violence against mother • Battering as role model • Forcing children to intervene • Other:

The Example of Gina & Harold

On the day her husband, Harold, was arrested, Gina was in the shelter with the children, ages five and seven. Unlike Harold, she does not speak English or have a job outside the home. Gina had applied for protection orders before, but had not gone beyond a temporary order, until now.

When Harold came to his first appointment prior to the start of visitation he brought photos of the “dirty” stove in their home, telling us, “Look how she does not take care of things!” In contrast, he pointed out, he can provide a detailed account of his day in precise increments of time, e.g., “At 12:15 I made macaroni and cheese for my children. At 4:45 I took them to soccer practice.”

Here’s how the sequence of weekly visits proceeded.

VISIT #1 Harold brought food, which excited the children. After the visit Gina told us that she did not want him to bring food, as it was used at home in a controlling way. He would give the children food when they were “good” and withhold it when they were “bad.”

VISIT #2 The staff felt they couldn’t prohibit Harold from bringing food without it being obvious that the ban was at Gina’s request, so at the second visit each parent brought food and the center tried to stay out of it.

VISIT #3 Gina changed her cell phone number because Harold had been calling her in between visits, telling her that she must go to court and say that she does not need the protection order or supervised visitation. Because Harold could not get to her, in retaliation he did not bring food for the children to the third visit.

VISIT #4 Harold wore a heavy amount of cologne and rubbed his neck against his children when hugging them, leaving the distinctive scent of the cologne on them. When the children left the visit and met their mother, the five-year-old told her, “I smell like my daddy’s neck.”

VISIT #5 Before the visit, the center called Harold with the standard reminder and asked him to please refrain from using cologne before his visits, citing a general need to avoid strong fragrances out of consideration for everyone using the center. When he arrived he was wearing the cologne and was furious. He did not bring any food for the children, refused to speak to them, and would not let them eat the snacks they had brought with them. When the staff member intervened and took him aside to talk with him, he said “My kids have a right to see that I am angry.” The children left the visit upset because their father did not speak to them during the entire visit. When his daughter arrived she had a green bow in her hair that was not there when she returned to Gina. Harold had thrown it in trash in the visitation room.

When Harold left the center after that visit, we called Gina to let her know that he was really angry and to encourage her to think about any additional safety planning that would be necessary. When he called back saying that he did not want to use the center anymore, we didn’t immediately cancel all future visits. We wanted to check with Gina first, to see how that might impact her safety. Nor did we want to push Harold to seek visitation services with a provider that did not have the same recognition of battering that we could provide.

This case offers a distilled example of many of the challenges and questions that visitation centers face in accounting for battering. From his first contact, Harold tried to enlist the center in agreeing with his characterization of Gina as a poor housekeeper and poor mother. There was coercion and stalking-like behavior going on outside of the center and unremitting attempts to pressure Gina into dropping the protection order and the divorce action. Gina and the children had been through the upheaval of leaving their home and each visit meant that Gina had to leave the immediate safety offered by the shelter. She was reluctant to share information with the center. When things were not going Harold's way during the visits, he began to make demands on the center and withhold attention from the children. Gina bore the brunt of the children's distress when their father would not interact with them. The actions that carried this complexity – a father wanting to feed his children and a father wearing cologne – are seemingly benign and can be easy to dismiss as exaggerated or overly sensitive. Recognizing how such actions fit into a pattern of battering requires developing a level of knowledge and skill in center staff that make it possible.

Among the shifts in thinking was recognizing the importance of infusing visitation center practices with awareness of battering tactics, particularly as they might look and change as a partner is attempting to end the relationship. This includes understanding how battering is different from other forms of domestic violence.¹⁰

10. The Praxis Safety & Accountability Audit is a tool for exploring and analyzing institutional responses to domestic violence. This approach, developed by Praxis International, uses a multidisciplinary team to examine how workers within agencies and systems are organized and coordinated to act on cases. Each demonstration site used the various methods of the Praxis Safety and Accountability Audit – focus groups, individual interviews, observations, and text analysis – to gather information and make sense of how visitation and safe exchange was organized and coordinated in the context of their specific question. Reports from each of the demonstration site's safety audit are available at www.praxisinternational.org.

post-separation safety and advocacy



“ Women often arrived at the centers with little or no understanding of a visitation center’s purpose and services. ”



Post-Separation Safety and Advocacy

Across the Demonstration Initiative discussions, there was recognition of the pervasive and powerful assumption that leaving or separation equals safety. No one – whether judge, center staff, or advocate – was immune to assuming that “she’s gone, he’s not beating her, so she’s safe.” The project illuminated some of the limitations of advocacy that is anchored so heavily in immediate crisis intervention and emergency shelter, the prevailing organization of advocacy available to battered women, as shaped in large part by the funding that supports it.

Yet leaving a batterer introduces a whole new set of struggles and considerations for safety. Victims of battering who are navigating this “post-separation” period require ongoing advocacy that accounts for shifting tactics of coercion and control, particularly around custody and visitation decisions.

Across the Demonstration Initiative, centers saw gaps in advocacy for victims of battering in the post-separation period, particularly as it stretched on beyond immediate assistance in obtaining a protection order or filing for divorce. The focus groups conducted as part of the Safety Audit at each site, centers’ contacts with individual women, and the information gathered by the local and national evaluators all reinforced the isolation and disconnect from advocacy experienced by battered women who came through the doors of the visitation centers.¹¹

11. Each demonstration site conducted a local evaluation of its work. In addition, they participated in a national evaluation the results of which are published in *National Evaluation of the Safe Havens Demonstration Initiative – Final Report*, by Daniel G. Saunders, Cris Sullivan, Richard M. Tolman, and Marguerite Grabarek. Submitted in 2006 and last revised in July 2007, the report will be released following final approval from the Office on Violence Against Women.

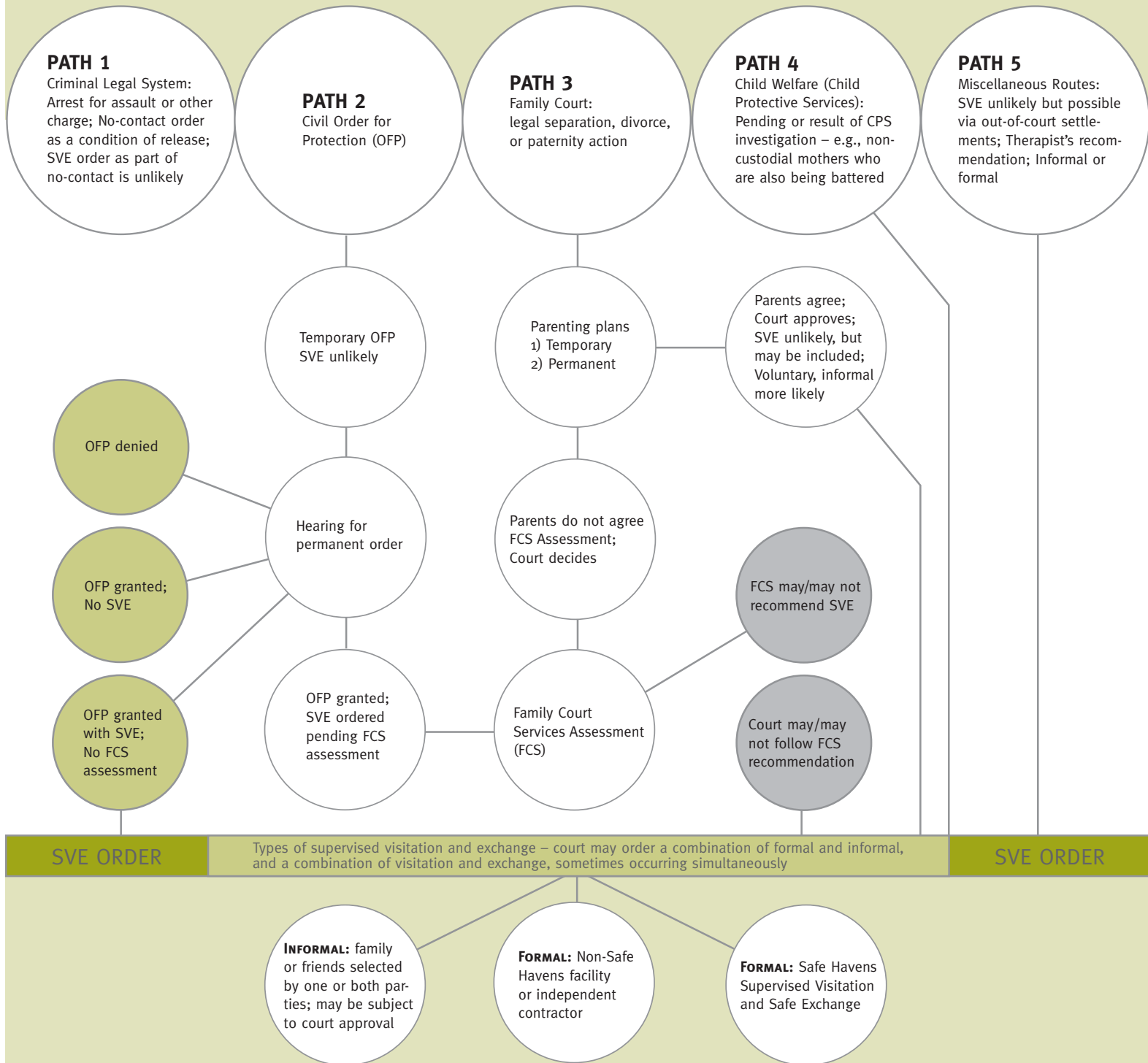
The Kent demonstration site provided a sharp example of the complex legal structures that battered women can become entangled in as they attempt to seek safety and leave a battering relationship, any of which can also lead to supervised visitation or exchange. Figure 2 illustrates five key paths, each of which has its own steps and sub-steps. Any one victim of battering could be caught up in two or more processes simultaneously and need competent advocacy at each step. This complexity of legal intervention in the lives of battered women was a common threat across the demonstration site communities.

Women often arrived at the centers with little or no understanding of a visitation center's purpose and services, with little or no connection with community-based advocates or private attorneys, and with much fear and apprehension, both around their partners' abusive behavior and the center's role. They had little contact with domestic violence services of any kind. Across the Demonstration Initiative, centers found that community-based advocates were not talking with women about supervised visitation or sometimes provided inaccurate information, such as reassuring a woman that the court would never give her abusive partner unsupervised access to the children. A woman might be connected with someone she considered to be an advocate who could act broadly on her behalf without understanding how the person's role was restricted to criminal court or protection order actions. The title "advocate" often carried much confusion, as the following list from one community illustrates: Domestic Violence Advocate, Community Advocate, Community Legal Advocate, Court-Based Legal Advocate, Protection Order Advocate.

The Demonstration Initiative partners concluded that it was not the visitation center's role to advocate for individual victims of battering, but to provide a meaningful link to competent advocacy. "Supervised visitation is not a service in lieu of advocacy. If anything, battered women using supervised visitation need an advocate more than ever. They've often gone into court actions pro se. They need to have a clear understanding of what supervised visitation or exchange is and what it isn't, before they get here." As another center director emphasized, "advocates have to have a way to talk with women about when not to use a visitation center: 'Here's what visitation can do, and do you need that kind of safety?' Women have to be prepared to articulate what they are afraid of or need for protection." In some states, the connection with a community-based advocate also offers a degree of confidentiality for a victim that is impossible for visitation center staff to provide. A "meaningful" link means that centers go beyond merely providing the usual phone number or brochure. They ask victims what they and their children need, make direct connections with specific practitioners, make calls directly from the center to link a victim with an advocate or agency, and provide space within the visitation center for advocates to meet with victims. As one project director noted, "this word 'meaningful' captured a big shift in our thinking."

Fig. 2
main paths to supervised visitation and exchange (sve) in king county domestic violence cases¹²

A battered woman leaves her abusive partner. She may or may not have contact with one or more advocacy, community, and legal system agencies – She may or may not have legal representation – She can be on two or more of these paths at the same time.



12. This represents the broad sweep of actions that can lead to supervised visitation or exchange. Each path involves many steps and sub-steps, some of which are illustrated. Each battered woman may need competent advocacy at each step.

While the demonstration sites did not see the center’s role as advocating for individual battered women, they nonetheless saw aspects of post-separation advocacy in the day-to-day work of the visitation center. A center cannot make a meaningful referral to advocacy without some level of understanding a victim’s experiences and needs. This perspective is built through the conversations that occur during orientation, as each family member is welcomed and introduced to visitation services; the center’s ongoing relationships with each person; and, ongoing contact via checking in with participants after and in between visits. In addition to identifying advocacy needs of victims, this emphasis on establishing relationships also positions a visitation center to respond to needs that their abusive partners may have, such as referrals to a batterer intervention program, substance abuse treatment, or assistance with housing, transportation, and employment.

In discussions about where and how victims of battering could link with advocacy during the post-separation period and while using supervised visitation or exchange, the demonstration sites emphasized flexibility and access to advocacy in many settings: “advocates should be everywhere!”








Strategies...

Linking victims of battering with post-separation advocacy

- ✓ Have an advocate available at the center one or more times a week
- ✓ Keep posters, brochures, or other material that explains the community-based advocacy available to victims of battering visible in the center
- ✓ Develop a videotape that addresses post-separation safety and advocacy questions and resources
- ✓ Assist women in identifying when it would be helpful to ask for an advocate (i.e., “here’s something an advocate could really help you with.”)
- ✓ Avoid staff working in isolation
- ✓ Ensure that all staff and community partners have regular and on-going communication to make certain that they can identify and support meaningful resources and referrals
- ✓ Participate in a community response to identify the gaps in post-separation support services for survivors of domestic violence (e.g., legal services, housing assistance, employment, job training assistance, individual and group support) and develop and expand these services



In their exploration of visitation services and advocacy, the Demonstration Initiative partners discovered that when a visitation center was operating under a domestic violence services agency it did not necessarily follow that the advocacy links would happen. Coexistence under the same organization did not always mean that the advocates understood the visitation side or actively made links between the women they worked with and visitation services. Nor did it mean that visitation center staff actively linked women with the advocacy side. In part, this stemmed from the notion of neutrality under which most visitation services were established, as discussed previously. In part it reflected different physical locations and assumptions that such connections were already in place. What became clear was that there had to be a deliberate review of how to make meaningful referrals and protocols in place to insulate one service from another around safety considerations, particularly with respect to what could and could not remain confidential in communications and case files in and across advocacy and visitation services.

intentional relationships



“ ...there was a growing realization that one of the most effective ways to keep adult and child victims safe was to build respectful and fair relationships with each person coming to the center. ”



Intentional Relationships

Exploring and establishing intentional, purposeful relationships in many settings became a hallmark of the Demonstration Initiative: relationships with children, mothers, and fathers; with victims of battering and batterers; with courts, advocates, and consulting committees. The partners recognized that visitation centers are thrown or pulled into many accidental or institutional relationships and they had the opportunity to examine how this could work in more deliberate ways. The Supervised Visitation Program's expectation of local system collaboration and the emerging principle of equal regard for adult victims and children also raised an obligation to ask questions about the nature of the relationships between a visitation program and the individuals and agencies it interacted with.

Hearing directly from women, children, and men using supervised visitation and safe exchange was critical to shifts in thinking and practice across the Demonstration Initiative. This happened via focus groups conducted as part of the Safety Audits, discussion panels at training institutes, "checking in" with parents as they used visitation services in the demonstration site centers, and information gleaned from the Demonstration Initiative local and national evaluations.


centers & families

Obviously, some kind of relationship is involved as soon as a connection is made between a person and a center. These are the institution-driven relationships established by the center's role and the person's obligation to meet the conditions of the order or referral. These are not relationships that start by asking what a person needs from the center in order to be safe and protected or to interact with a child in ways that are healing and non-coercive.

The demonstration sites stepped back and asked what the relationships between a center and those using its services could look like, instead of assuming a particular relationship between “monitors” and “custodial parents.” How might those relationships look if the center's role shifted to one of paying equal regard to adult victims and children and accounting for battering? As one center director put it, “building relationships with people was the best security measure we've ever taken.”

As the demonstration sites began to examine what those relationships looked like, and could look like, there was a growing realization that one of the most effective ways to keep adult and child victims safe was to build respectful and fair relationships with each person coming to the center. For many adult and child victims of battering, the center could be one setting where they need not fear judgment or repercussions for having been victimized. For many batterers, respectful treatment can go a long way toward diminishing their hostility and resentment and helping them focus on making the most of their time with their children.

Holding this goal does not mean pretending that it is necessarily a smooth process. The demonstration site centers are the first to acknowledge that building relationships in the context of domestic violence is challenging. A center often faces competing needs and expectations from families, the courts, probation, advocates, and others. It is in many ways much easier to take a generic approach that says, in effect, “We're not interested in the particulars of your life or why you're here or how you get here. Show up on Tuesday at 6:00 p.m. for one hour. We'll sit and watch you and your children and make sure nothing ‘inappropriate’ happens. At the end of one hour you wait fifteen minutes and then you can leave. You'll repeat the routine again next week.” This kind of relationship is simple; the center does not have to pay much if any attention to the life experiences of people or the following sorts of realities in their lives.



An adult victim might arrive at supervised visitation exhausted by the work of trying to stay safe and trying to escape. She might feel that the visitation order itself shows the batterer's power in getting courts and other systems to act on his behalf. She will not necessarily trust that her experience at the center will be any different. She might be frightened, angry, and suspicious of the center. She might come across as “crazy,” particularly if she is a visiting parent who has found the batterer's threat come true: “if you leave me, I'll take the kids.” Just getting to the center at a certain day and time might require negotiating work schedules, bus schedules and children's schedules, or depend on her car staying in good repair. Her children might not want to be anywhere near their father, or they may be eager to see him and blame her for their separation from him. They may be annoyed that their routines with friends, sports, and after-school activities are interrupted by visitation. They may be afraid for their mother or angry at her or both. They may have many conflicting feelings about what has happened in their lives and what this new routine known as visitation or exchange will demand of them.

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

Via ongoing examination and critique of their own practices, the demonstration sites concluded that visitation centers can build relationships that account for the complex impact of battering and people's lived experiences with oppression, but the effort must be proactive and well prepared. It cannot be haphazard, and there are many impediments, including professional roles and training, the ways in which forms and other required documentation shape interactions, and fear of batterers.

Assumptions and Forms Get in the Way

Helping professions such as social work, child welfare, or increasingly advocacy in a domestic violence agency, are structured to reinforce certain experiences, education, and expertise. This professional standing positions staff members as more knowledgeable and therefore more powerful in relation to those who need help. This “professionalizing” feature of institutions is very compelling. It makes it easy for frameworks and assumptions related to that training to get in the way of building meaningful relationships: *custodial parent, noncustodial parent, appropriate parenting, classic battered woman, high-conflict relationship, cycle of violence, anger management problem*. It makes it easy to see people in terms of a category, and to respond according to assumptions and expectations about that category. It makes it difficult to remain humane, open, flexible, and responsive to what families need and want from supervised visitation and safe exchange.

The Demonstration Initiative centers found that they used a variety of forms in their work of providing services to families, such as those related to conducting intakes with parents, obtaining consent for release of information, observing visits, explaining rules, and authorizing services. At the beginning of their work together the forms looked very much the same across the centers. In many cases, they had used a sample provided by another agency elsewhere in the country or the community, which in turn reflected prevailing practices of supervised visitation and its emphasis on child welfare, parental access to children, and a neutral stance in the relationship between the parents. Yet there is no such thing as a “neutral” form. Forms tell practitioners what to do as workers, whether as visitation center staff or bank tellers. Forms are very good at doing what they do best: namely, to **direct** workers to pay attention to certain things and ignore the rest; to take or avoid certain actions; and to determine whether someone will be accepted as an official “case,” regardless of their unique and particular needs. When interaction with someone is directed by a form, filling out the form will most likely prevail, in spite of good intentions to have a two-way conversation that pays attention to the needs of the person and to establish a helpful relationship.

Forms are framed by theories, language, and categories, although these assumptions are largely invisible, particularly to workers in their own field. Forms reflect the ideology and language carried by a discipline such as social work, law, or psychology. They reflect the terms through which practitioners speak to one another, such as best interests of the child or appropriate parenting or parentified child or the

custodial. Forms construct policies and processes and frame something as acceptable for official action. Forms help professionals filter someone's real, complex experience into categories that oversimplify that experience and distort their needs.

Questioning and examining the ways in which the standard intake process and form shaped the relationships between a center and those using its services led the demonstration sites to suggest new approaches to how each family member is welcomed and introduced to supervised visitation and safe exchange, as discussed later in this paper. This new approach – orientation – seeks to build a relationship with each family member using the center, build a foundation for safety, and recognize and meet families' unique needs.¹³

Fear Gets in the Way

In candid discussions across the demonstration sites and other grantees, workers readily acknowledged the challenges, frustrations, and fears in working with batterers. They spoke of fear as a significant obstacle to building relationships that balance engagement with safety, that avoid a punitive or excessively policed environment while acknowledging the very real dangers that battered women and their children face. “How do you connect at a human level when you know what a batterer has done to a woman and her kids?” was how one visitation worker described the dilemma. They spoke of fear of colluding with batterers and sometimes of fear for themselves and the center. They spoke of fear of making dangerous decisions, of doing harm, and making things worse for victims of battering and their children.

The demonstration sites recognized that this fear could too readily push aside aspects of basic courtesy and respect. One center director described the impact of this fear, and the changes they began to make in this way:

“There was no message that we were glad to see the fathers, glad that they were at our center; there was little acknowledgement of them as people. We started there, with welcoming, shaking hands, having conversations, making time, and checking in about their whole lives. ‘Do you have food, a place to sleep, work?’ We started there and that allowed us to build a more authentic interaction and conversations about why a father was there, why something happened in a visit, and calling them on their behavior.”

13. The work of the Demonstration Initiative contributed greatly to developing this new approach, as summarized in two products developed by Praxis International: 1) a think piece written by Jane Sadusky, *New Perspectives on Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange: Orientation* (2008), and 2) *Building the Practice of Orientation: A Trainer's Guide*, (2008), a training curriculum for supervised visitation centers. Both products are available from Praxis International, www.praxisinternational.org.

Dialogue with batterers was sometimes restricted by staff discomfort in working with, talking, and “being alone” with the person. Most center staff had received little if any training or mentored practice related to working with batterers. There was often a misperception that batterers will attack staff at any moment and the only way to control this situation was to ensure that all of the rules were followed under all circumstances. Under these conditions, respectful conversation can get lost and every question seen as a challenge, when some questions are genuinely efforts to clarify or understand some aspect of visitation. At the same time, as every center acknowledged, the reality and tricky ground is that batterers are indeed often actively trying to intimidate the center and draw it into colluding with the abuse.

Being vigilant regarding the safety of a victim and her children while also establishing and maintaining a respectful relationship with a batterer that acknowledges him as a person is a skill that has to be acquired in order to provide the safest practice. Those who provide batterer intervention services emphasize that changing violent, coercive, and controlling behavior requires taking responsibility and accounting for that behavior and the harm it has caused. Supervised visitation centers do not have the same role as a batterer intervention program, however. Working with batterers in the context of visiting their children is a new area of development with much that remains to be learned. It is particularly challenging when a batterer who has evaded wider community accountability is using the center as the custodial parent.

The Demonstration Initiative came to recognize that visitation centers could not interact effectively with batterers without learning how to do so within the setting of visitation and exchange. This did not mean turning staff into facilitators for a batterer intervention group, but developing the skill to see and respond with respectful, effective boundaries. Conversation can be as protective as pulling out the rules and canceling a visit. It can lessen hostility, divert a batterer’s attention from his children’s mother, and open a window to change.

Ideally, visitation centers should be able to look to batterer intervention programs to help develop the necessary skills. The experience across the demonstration sites, however, was that it was a difficult connection to establish. It was often poorly developed in the wider community response and existing batterer intervention programs did not recognize supervised visitation and safe exchange as aspects of long-term safety planning. One demonstration site interviewed batterer intervention staff and discovered that no one could recall ever having regular discussions with men about visitation with their children, or recall having men in their groups who were using a visitation center. Another site was more encouraging about the experience of bringing representation from the abuser program into its local collaboration and the impact of that participation in changing how the program addressed issues related to supervised visitation and the impact of battering on children and their fathers and mothers.



Strategies... working with batterers


- ✓ Prepare staff to understand and recognize battering beliefs and behaviors, acknowledge their fears, and *practice* talking and interacting with batterers
- ✓ Send staff to the training that domestic violence program staff and volunteers complete
- ✓ Invite the batterer intervention program to conduct an in-service training series on the tactics of battering
- ✓ Make the center a welcome place to go each week (e.g., “we want it to be a welcome place to be with their children, distinct from other aspects of a court order, such as an urinalysis, BIP, and drug treatment”)
- ✓ Be clear and up-front about the center and its purpose (e.g., “We acknowledge that everyone is there because of a domestic violence allegation or finding and provide a sample of the observation forms that we use and an explanation of how we use them”)
- ✓ Never lumping “batterers” together under a single category, but determining individual circumstances and needs around danger and safety
- ✓ Ensure that voices of adult victims and children inform the approach and decisions when working with every father coming to the visitation center
- ✓ Begin relationships with clear expectations and boundaries



Strategies...

working with
batterers,
continued...

- ✓ Help prepare men for services; i.e., talking about how it will feel to come to the center, how their children might greet them, what will happen when they are there, activities to do with their children, questions their children might have and how to answer them
- ✓ Develop a strong and consistent community response to battering and acknowledge and agree that it may not be safe for all batterers to use a visitation center or to have access to their children
- ✓ Provide opportunities for change and healing, but make certain that the safety of victims and children is the first priority
- ✓ Explore staff attitudes and beliefs about working with men who have used violence and provide support and training to address it in an on-going way



All of the demonstration sites conducted focus groups with mothers and fathers using the participating centers. In their discussions with mothers, they were surprised to learn that many victims of battering did not necessarily see the center as a resource for them. They saw visitation centers as primarily a point of access between a father and his children, not as a place that paid attention to their safety. Few battered women sought out the visitation center as part of an intentional safety planning process. A woman might not know the center existed until a court order directed her to the doorstep. Once inside, she had relatively little contact with staff and few conversations; she brought the children, picked them up, and had fifteen minutes to leave, knowing that center staff spent many hours with her children's father. "We started off assuming that women would tell us what we needed to know about their safety," observed one director, "then realized that it takes time for them to be comfortable with us, or they thought we were part of the court and didn't know that we're independent and here to protect them." Some women resented that the abusers still had access to the children, in spite of the abuse they and their children had lived with, and often under personal hardship or inconvenience. A victim who was essentially the sole caregiver during the relationship was often particularly resentful that despite his lack of previous involvement, the center would now assist him in having a kind of artificial parenting.



Strategies...

shaping safety-oriented relationships with adult victims of battering

14. One example is a pamphlet written by Jill Davies, *Supervised Visitation Programs: Information for Mothers Who Have Experienced Abuse*, Family Violence Prevention Fund (2007). The pamphlet is available at www.endabuse.org.

- ✓ Fit visitation services to individual circumstances and account for and revise according to changing safety needs
- ✓ Ask women, for example:
 - “Here’s what the center can do. How does that work for you?”
 - “What do you need for you and your children to feel safe here?”
 - “What’s changed since you filed the divorce papers?”
 - “What do we need to do differently for your safety now that you’ve moved out of the shelter?”
- ✓ Develop or provide a guide for battered women about what to know about supervised visitation and exchange and how to request or object to it¹⁴
- ✓ Provide a check-in time with each parent at the end of a visit or at another time
 - E.g., Have a brief phone call the next day with a mother who had to get young, tired children into car seats – or get everyone home via bus – at the end of a day of work and school or day care, capped by visitation
- ✓ Conduct periodic check-in phone calls with adult victims
- ✓ Link battered women with community-based advocates
- ✓ Encourage victims of battering to think about and communicate concerns about transitions to less supervised access to their advocates or attorneys
- ✓ Support safety planning that accounts for culture and identity (including the possibility that cultural beliefs, practices, and expectations might be used as tactics of abuse)

centers & collaborating partners

The Supervised Visitation Program funding in many ways forced the issue of collaboration between visitation centers, courts, and domestic violence advocacy agencies. Each of the demonstration sites was required to establish specific working relationships with the courts and domestic violence advocacy agencies in their communities.

For almost every center these were new relationships. There had been little connection or direct communication between centers, courts, and advocates, particularly around the substantive questions of their respective roles and purposes in the context of safety for adult and child victims of battering. Building these relationships was among the most challenging of the tasks set before the demonstration sites. Part of it occurred across the national work of the demonstration sites and the larger Supervised Visitation Program, via audio-conference sessions and think tanks that brought together various combinations of visitation center staff, community-based advocates, and judicial officers and other court personnel. Part of it occurred at a very local level within each demonstration site.

Advocates

One center director was blunt in describing the challenge of bringing advocates into the Demonstration Initiative: “The Safe Havens centers seemed to come out of nowhere and the advocates’ reaction was ‘Who do you think you are?’ We’ve been doing all of this work in advocacy and suddenly you appear, and you get money as well.” The governmental agencies that received grant funds were required to collaborate with domestic violence advocates, but they typically did not and could not distribute grant funds in ways that fully supported that collaboration; the overall program was not structured to provide proportionate funding for advocacy partners.

Others cited advocates’ wariness about the role of supervised visitation in protecting battered women and their children. They could describe situations where batterers had used visitation services to manipulate decision makers and gain a level of custody and access that did not account for the extent and impact of their abuse and the ongoing risks to adult victims and children. For some advocates, the very existence of the center was a form of collusion by promoting a batterer’s access to children and ultimately access to their mother. As one center director described the tension, “domestic violence programs are very skeptical about what visitation centers are doing with women. Advocates are representing battered women; they don’t see how a visitation center

is going to address women’s needs. They think that supervised visitation centers provide services only to batterers and don’t see how they will help women.”

Centers that had developed out of or were affiliated with domestic violence organizations did not necessarily experience less challenge in forging a more collaborative relationship around visitation and exchange. Early on in the Demonstration Initiative, in particular, there was little sense of a common mission in building safety for battered women and their children. Coming under the umbrella of a domestic violence agency in some ways pressured centers to present themselves as more rigidly neutral to the reality of the violence than as they actually functioned on a daily basis. The advocacy program and the visitation center were “silos,” as one center director put it, standing alongside one another, but with no real integration or communication, in spite of being within the same organization.

In discussions about advocacy and the role of a visitation center, the demonstration sites were clear that the center’s role was not to act as an advocate for individual adult victims, but to understand individuals’ needs, participate in the wider community response, and build relationships with those providing advocacy services in ways that supported meaningful referrals, such as providing a link to a specific practitioner.

One center director described the shift in this way: “Advocates are now calling us to bring women through the center and see what we do. I don’t think they’re seeing the center as a way for him to get to her, but as a way for her to comply with the court order,” in ways that keep her out of trouble with the court and contribute to her ongoing safety.

The Demonstration Initiative emphasized the mutual responsibilities and roles that domestic violence advocacy programs and supervised visitation programs have to ensure that the environment created around visitation and exchange is one that supports victims of battering in ways that are culturally relevant and not blaming or re-victimizing. The participating centers recognized that they needed to be part of the larger community response to domestic violence. They needed to build and demonstrate an understanding of battering that would reassure advocates that visitation services would be genuinely protective and useful as an element of post-separation safety planning. Being at the table as part of the wider response helped close the gap between visitation centers and advocates, increase their willingness to learn from each other, diminish defensiveness, improve communication, and build trust.



Strategies...

strengthening
relationships
with domestic
violence advocacy
programs

- ✓ Invite advocates to tour the center
- ✓ Hold a monthly brown-bag lunch meeting or similar regular event
- ✓ Invite advocates to participate in the demonstration site's Safety Audit
- ✓ Review center policies and procedures with advocates
- ✓ Collaborate to develop an understanding of the limits and parameters of confidentiality, protocols that support communication between centers and advocates, and a clear understanding of when communication about a person cannot occur
- ✓ Invite advocates to participate in a mock intake or orientation
- ✓ Send visitation center staff to training conducted by domestic violence advocates
- ✓ Review case scenarios together to talk about how to best approach visitation and post-separation advocacy
- ✓ Initiate joint discussions about the role of supervised visitation and exchange in post-separation advocacy and safety planning
- ✓ Invite advocates to Supervised Visitation Program forums, conferences, and other activities, and use that opportunity to talk about their work together in a more informal social setting, framed by the atmosphere and tone of the larger national discussion
- ✓ Organize and/or participate in cross-training whenever possible, such as training on custody and visitation laws and practices as they relate to domestic violence cases
- ✓ Engage in partnerships that equally engage and support each partner financially

Courts

As the Demonstration Initiative got underway, most centers had little direct contact and few conversations with judges and other court officials, even though most families arrived at the centers via a court order of some kind. As the demonstration site work progressed, it was clear that centers had been making assumptions about courts, and vice versa. Overall, there was little structure in place for a center to articulate to a court what it needed to effectively work with a family, or for the court to articulate what it needed to make decisions about ongoing safety.

It was a common experience across most of the centers to receive referrals – i.e., a parent (and by extension a family) ordered to supervised visitation or exchange – with little information about why any particular family member or child needed the protective setting of the center. Referrals were largely generic, presenting every person as equally appropriate for visitation, frequently with the same wording and directions to each parent, regardless of who was at risk. A center often first learned that it had been named in a court order when a noncustodial parent called to set up visits; parents routinely arrived with little information about the center’s role and services.

Centers were concerned, based on past experience in specific cases, that if they rejected a referral when they saw visitation or exchange as inappropriate because it was too dangerous, the court response would be to grant unsupervised access or supervised access that was uninformed by an understanding of domestic violence, rather than question parental access itself. Courts, in turn, often assumed that centers knew that decision makers wanted to know about any information relevant to someone’s safety, including adult victims as well as children. There was a hesitancy to engage in debate or dialogue about the relationship between a visitation center and the court. “Before we started meeting with the courts we had many assumptions, and the biggest was if we turned down a visitation referral as too dangerous, unsupervised exchange at McDonald’s would be the response.”

As they began to reach out to their court partners, several centers experienced a shift in assumptions similar to this: “My belief that the courts might consider us ‘just another agency,’ was unfounded when we became more interactive, particularly with the judges and prosecuting attorney. It was surprising that they wanted to be highly active and involved with Safe Havens... they were willing to have extra meetings and were strongly supportive in our daily operations.” Once the demonstration sites began having conversations with judges, they saw that it was often less a matter of courts resisting the connection between protecting adult victims and protecting children and more a matter of the question going unasked and the connection going unexplored.



Strategies...

building relationships with court partners

- ✓ Invite judges and court personnel to tour the center
- ✓ Develop relationships with key personnel that judicial decision makers rely upon in making custody and visitation decisions, such as family court services and custody evaluators
- ✓ Develop and revamp court referral forms to be specific to domestic violence referrals
- ✓ Host local training for judges and court personnel with nationally recognized practitioners and researchers on the impact of battering on child and adult victims
- ✓ Hold discussions with court partners about “tough” cases and aspects of decision-making, such as:
 - Cases where use of the center and visitation itself seemed too dangerous for children, a parent, or staff
 - Cases where children are reluctant or refuse to visit
 - Cases where the center had concerns about someone’s safety in the transition to less protective access, such as a jump from supervised visitation to unrestricted access
- ✓ Examine the referral process and questions related to the kinds of information courts should gather regarding danger and safety (e.g., police reports, sentencing recommendations, order for protection affidavits, and child welfare records), what should be shared with a visitation centers, and how a center should receive that information



Strategies...

building relationships
with court partners,
continued...

- ✓ Invite judges and court personnel to Supervised Visitation Program forums, conferences, and other activities, and using that opportunity to talk about their work together in a more informal social setting, within the atmosphere and tone of the larger national discussion
- ✓ Engage the court and judicial officers in providing training to visitation center staff about
 - [1] how the court works;
 - [2] the types and function of court orders; and,
 - [3] the kinds of decisions courts make related to the work of a visitation center
- ✓ Develop improved working relationships and open communication between center and court staff
- ✓ Avoid interacting with the courts and judicial officers solely via court and center documents; develop face-to-face relationships
- ✓ Anticipate, plan, and be informed when new court and judicial officers are elected or rotated in
- ✓ Provide courts with updated program information (i.e., referral process, hours of operation, security features, reasons why visitation services would be used, and overview of staff training)


Across the demonstration sites, there was a frank assessment that courts would not necessarily have pursued these discussions without the requirement of collaboration in the Demonstration Initiative. Even with that expectation there was the reality of a court's power and authority within a community that could work against a truly collaborative relationship. "There seems to be a certain amount of intimidation from the bench that has to be more clearly raised," was one program director's assessment. The concept of judicial autonomy can trump collaboration, leaving forty-four individual judges, as one demonstration site noted, with forty-four agendas, definitions, and assumptions in hearing custody and visitation-related cases.

centers & communities

Culture and Identity

Centers across the four demonstration sites struggled with questions of how to recognize, acknowledge, and account for people's diverse cultures and identities in providing visitation and exchange services. There was unanimous acknowledgment that much thinking and attention is still required to define what supervised visitation should look like if it is to welcome and meet the needs of diverse communities and individuals. It was difficult in discussions to get beyond equating culture with race and difficult to get beyond the physical space of "a center" to imagine protective ways of one parent to spend time with children in ways that would not harm the children or the other parent. As one of the initiative partners posed the question: "How do we organize ourselves to be flexible, to sit with people, to converse, to find out how they are, to find out what they need?" Would it even look like what has come to be known as a supervised visitation center?

Building from discussions generated by the Chicago partners, in particular, the demonstration sites emphasized the intentional, deliberate examination of their work and engaging those who use or might use their centers in shaping what they will look like. All aspects of center practices and assumptions must be considered: concepts of timeliness, showing emotion, language, food, parenting styles, religion, holidays, extended families... race, class, gender, sexual orientation. And all considered within the context of safety for adult victims of battering and their children. One project director summed up the challenge in this way: "Because the issue of culture is so complicated, it can stop us from doing anything! We don't know exactly what to do and we're afraid that we'll make mistakes and someone will be harmed."



Complicated, but critical to figure out, and not impossible, was the consensus in the Demonstration Initiative discussions. For example, begin with a conversation, as many of the centers emphasized. “One thing that has helped is asking what we should watch for, asking her what she’s afraid of and how we can help. With him, we ask similar questions. What are you worried about in using the center?” Another center director elaborated on this kind of starting point, flexibility, and challenge to assumptions.

Engaging in a conversation about how you would like to spend your time: whether around food, relatives and who comes, and why they want them to come and what that means culturally. Being willing to talk with the family about those options, while always keeping the needs of battered women and safety up front. Acknowledging your own parenting preferences and your background; responding as opposed to reacting, not making assumptions on how to intervene as far as “appropriate parenting.” Responding rather than coming in with preconceived ideas. When a family comes through the door they have their own sense of what they need and staff needs to be informed about broader information of the culture, but you need to individualize that person. Asking: How should it (the visit) look for you? We assume a lot — we need to take that out of the equation to be more culturally relevant, more human.



Strategies... accounting for diverse cultures and identities

***Caution:** Safety and adult victims and their children must remain at the forefront; culture does not trump safety. The goal is to build safety in ways that also acknowledge and support people's cultures and identities. Each of the following strategies should be read as concluding with the following cautionary phrase: in the context of safety for adult victims and children.*

- ✓ Invite diverse community organizations to walk through the center's space and procedures and provide a critique
- ✓ Use staff meetings, ad hoc work groups, community members, and parents to help examine every aspect of the center's design and the implied and explicit messages about who is welcome and how they are valued
- ✓ Pay careful attention to recognizing and addressing peoples' different experiences with legal systems and the court
- ✓ Structure time and flexibility into all interactions with children and parents
- ✓ Build processes to understand and acknowledge families' experiences with the courts, police, welfare, health care, and other intervening institutions, both individually and historically
- ✓ Account for battering and the safety of mothers and children without demonizing fathers
- ✓ Prepare staff to accommodate and switch back and forth between someone's first language and English
- ✓ Recruit bilingual and bicultural staff and volunteers



Strategies...

accounting for
diverse cultures
and identities,
continued...


- ✓ Plan for and meet needs for language interpretation
 - Screen and obtain personal recommendations for interpreters
 - Be clear about center's expectations and interpreter's role in visitation setting
 - Use less-invasive microphone and headset system
- ✓ Provide opportunities for extended family to be involved and recognize people's broad definitions of who is included as "family"
- ✓ Hold all-center gatherings (within the context of safety, the specifics of court orders, and adequate supervision)
- ✓ Support food and music traditions
- ✓ Minimize note-taking during visits
- ✓ Engage in an organization self-assessment to determine:
 - [1] the impact of the systems you represent on different communities;
 - [2] the role your system or organization has played in the oppression, exclusions, or isolation of specific communities; and,
 - [3] how culturally responsive your partners, staff, and governing boards have been
- ✓ Ask different communities to assess:
 - [1] how the community views your organization;
 - [2] if you are a trusted resource in the community; and,
 - [3] whether you are seen as part of the community or as an outsider or not inclusive

The experience of the Demonstration Initiative raised many questions about how and whether people from certain communities or ethnicities were being excluded, rejecting the service, using family members to monitor visits, being seen as more or less dangerous, or being seen as more or less deserving of protection. For example, Michigan found that African Americans were underrepresented in supervised visitation services, in contrast to their overrepresentation in the child welfare and criminal legal systems. Chicago had a different experience, however, with African American families utilizing supervised visitation services far beyond their representation in the overall population. Whether or not that reflects disparities in how courts make decisions about visitation in cases of domestic violence is unknown. It may, for example, reflect a visitation center that was affiliated with an organization that is known for its services to African American residents of the city and therefore carries the kind of credibility and trust that draws parents to it, as was suggested in the focus group discussions. Across the sites there were similar examples of over- and under-representation of different races and ethnicities in proportion to their population in the community. There was no single pattern or trend, however, but significant variability across the sites, which suggests a need for more inquiry into how and under what circumstances people reach supervised visitation services.

Coordinated Community Response

Supervised visitation has developed historically in isolation from other service providers and community organizations. Along with its emphasis on centralizing safety for adult victims and their children, integrating supervised visitation and safe exchange into the larger community response to battering and other forms of domestic violence was among the many changes encouraged by the Supervised Visitation Program and the Demonstration Initiative. In addition to their discussions among their own local collaborating partners, the demonstration sites shared the questions and thinking that emerged over the course of this work with one another, as well as with OVW, the technical assistance partners, and other grantees.

“Being in isolation is ineffective,” offered one center director in discussing the importance of linking to the wider community response to domestic violence, “and locating visitation in this larger work needs to be seen as part of the response.” In return, courts and domestic violence partners have a responsibility to be knowledgeable about visitation and make referrals to safe visitation.



While the core partners in the Demonstration Initiative included visitation centers, domestic violence advocates, and the courts, each site was required to establish a consulting committee that represented a broader sweep of intervening agencies and interested persons. The distinction between partners and the consulting committee was not always clear, in part because consulting committees also tended to include representation from the core partner agencies. There was agreement across the project directors that holding back and establishing the consulting committee later in the project's development would have been more useful. "We didn't do well choosing the right members in the beginning," was a common sentiment, as well as the view that consulting committees often lacked a good balance between those in key decision-making positions and those with the perspective of front-line, everyday work with people, as well as a good balance between those who were engaged in the questions raised through the Demonstration Initiative and those with limited interest.

The demonstration sites shared the view that collaboration between visitation centers and other practitioners and intervening agencies is essential, as is integrating supervised visitation and exchange within the larger community response to domestic violence. Whether that comes via establishing a separate advisory type of committee or via bringing visitation into an existing coordinated community response structure, or both, is unclear. Planning, implementing, and sustaining a supervised visitation program require different skills, information, and abilities, often best met by small, active groups. The perspective of the visitation center, and acknowledgement of its unique role in its relationships with each family member, can get lost in a larger structure.



Strategies...

engaging community partners and the wider community

- ✓ Bring center representation into the coordinated community response, not as just another seat at the table, but linked to larger systems advocacy and change
- ✓ Integrate supervised visitation and safe exchange into the larger community systems work and existing collaborations
- ✓ “Keep the discussion up front,” meaning encourage deeper discussion and attention to issues of post-separation advocacy
- ✓ Bring a redacted case file to interveners from different fields and read it together, asking “Where and how did we help or hurt this victim of battering and her children? Where and how did we help or hurt this batterer to acknowledge and begin to repair the harm?”
- ✓ Participate in community activities and projects, such as projects addressing racial disparities or support for immigrant communities, resource fairs
- ✓ Contribute to formal and informal networks across the community, such as sitting on a domestic violence task force or attending neighborhood fairs or the battered women’s shelter annual fundraising event
- ✓ Spend time in the “life” of the community via attending arts and sports events, shopping, dining
- ✓ Engage diverse community members in providing training and staff development

orientation



“ *Orientation sets the tone and begins the process of engagement with women, men, and children using the center’s services.* ”



Orientation

At the beginning of their work together, the nine established visitation centers welcomed and introduced people to the center in very much the same way.¹⁵ Their processes and forms were largely interchangeable, using a standard “intake” process that was centered on completing a form that recorded name, age, and race; contact information; referral source; children’s names, ages, and schools; employer and income; medical and emergency information; vehicle description and license plate number; custody status; days of the week and times available for visitation; and, whether there was a current restraining order or history of domestic violence. The center reviewed its rules, offered a tour of the facility, and obtained signatures on a variety of notices and releases.

While there was some variation in how the intake form was completed – some centers asked parents to complete it beforehand and reviewed it during the appointment while others filled in the form during an interview – the information and focus was the same. The process was oriented toward meeting the center’s administrative and operational needs. Is this family eligible for visitation or exchange? Who is “the custodial”? Who is “the noncustodial”? Who will pay for the services? When is the visiting parent available? How does the center contact each parent? Who will bring children to the center? What is the vehicle description and plate in case of abduction?

15. Kent, WA and Muskegon, MI designed and opened centers as part of the Demonstration Initiative.

When the demonstration sites stepped back and examined this intake process more critically they discovered that it was inadequate in paying equal regard for safety, accounting for safety over time, acknowledging culture and identity, and building meaningful relationships with people using the center. It was not at all a matter of workers who were uncaring or unconcerned, but the ways in which the prevailing intake process was organized limited the approach.

The degree to which a victim of battering is able to and comfortable with completing an intake form influences how much of the picture she or he provides. If a mother does not trust that the information is going to be kept safe, or does not have a clear understanding of what the visitation center needs to know about her experience, she is unlikely to volunteer it. While some intake forms included questions about current restraining orders or history of domestic violence, they tended to be yes or no questions or two to five lines in length, as if to say ‘tell us this much and nothing more.’ In reviewing completed intake forms, for example, there was sketchy information about the kind of battering tactics that might have been used or were currently being used. It was not uncommon to find a woman write something like “he was violent with me during pregnancy” on those two lines, but to have no indication of any conversation with the visitation center worker that would establish the severity and frequency of the violence.


Circumstances of literacy and language influence how a form gets completed and questions get understood and answered. There was little in the intake process to guide visitation center staff toward dialogue with a parent in ways that would add to an understanding of how to best recognize parents and children’s cultural identities. Questions such as these routinely went unexplored: Who are you close to? Who is considered family? Where do you get support? What holidays, customs, and foods are important to you and your children? If an immigrant or refugee, under what circumstances did you and your children come to this community? What is it like to talk about the divorce in your community? What is it like to talk about the abuse you have experienced? What is it like to talk about why you must visit your children at this center? The design of the prevailing intake process required center staff to consciously step outside the form in order to connect with parents and children in ways that account for culture and identity.

Via their observation and critique of this intake process, the demonstration sites saw that center staff assigned the task of completing it usually had an hour or less to do so. They had no time or flexibility to consciously step outside of the form. Their role was clearly to review the rules and procedures, obtain needed signatures, arrange payments, and develop a visitation or exchange schedule. They could not ask or answer questions such as: What are you concerned about? What are you afraid of? What do you need? How might your partner use the center to get at you, to threaten or scare you?

Words carry weight and meaning, concepts and philosophy. A new word can stand in for a new way of thinking and help signal intended changes. The Demonstration Initiative settled on “orientation” as the word to represent the shift in thinking that repositions supervised visitation to pay equal regard to adult victims of battering, account for safety over time, and build relationships. Orientation is distinguished from intake in part by where it positions the person who is coming through the door. Orientation represents a deliberate, thoughtful effort to fit the **center to the person**, rather than fit the person to the center. It represents an intention to keep the unique needs of each family member as the primary focus, rather than the business needs of the center.

The demonstration sites in no way ignored or abandoned the importance of certain identifying, logistical, and referral information to a visitation center’s day-to-day operations. Clearly a center must know about names, ages, addresses, medical allergies, court orders, parents’ work schedules, etc., but under the practice of orientation, obtaining this information is no longer the centerpiece of welcoming and introducing family members to the center. Conversation and building a relationship come first; meeting the administrative needs of the center comes second. Orientation accomplishes both, but clearly and deliberately puts the person first and emphasizes conversation, dialogue, and relationship over filling in the blanks on an intake form.¹⁶

16. The work of the Demonstration Initiative contributed greatly to developing this new approach, as summarized in two products developed by Praxis International: 1) a think piece written by Jane Sadusky, *New Perspectives on Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange: Orientation* (2008), and 2) *Building the Practice of Orientation: A Trainer’s Guide*, (2008), a training curriculum for supervised visitation centers. Both products are available from Praxis International, www.praxisinternational.org.



The shift from intake to orientation requires new administrative practices around how people are introduced and welcomed to the center, such as the timing, procedures, and forms used to gather and record information necessary for the center's operation and scheduling. New practices related to orientation involve changes in resources, training, and how workers are linked within the visitation center, as well as in relation to other community interveners and, most importantly, how they are linked with families using the center.

Orientation sets the tone and begins the process of engagement with women, men, and children using the center's services. It is the linchpin in visitation center practices that build safety and help repair the harm caused by battering.



Strategies... orientation

Moving from the largely static, center-oriented perspective of “intake” to the more dynamic, person-centered process of orientation requires intention and planning to develop the necessary base of knowledge and skills that prepare a visitation center and its workers to:

- ✓ Pay equal regard for the safety of child and adult victims
- ✓ Recognize and account for batterers’ use of post-separation tactics of power and control
- ✓ Acknowledge and value families unique identities and needs
- ✓ Carry respectful and fair intentions throughout all aspects of a center’s relationships with family members
- ✓ Participate in community collaborations to address domestic violence
- ✓ Link child and adult victims with advocacy

Strategies for welcoming and introducing mothers, fathers, and children to supervised visitation and safe exchange are addressed in detail in the following publications developed by and available from Praxis International:

- ✓ New Perspectives on Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange: Orientation
- ✓ Building the Practice of Orientation: A Trainer’s Guide

documentation



“ *It’s the ongoing struggle between too much information and not enough information.* ”

as one center director described the intertwined subjects of documentation and confidentiality



Documentation

“It’s the ongoing struggle between too much information and not enough information,” as one center director described the intertwined subjects of documentation and confidentiality. Documentation has remained a persistent focus of deliberation within the Demonstration Initiative. What kind of documentation of history and danger should accompany a referral? What should a center write down? Who should have access to a center’s records, and under what circumstances? How should a center communicate with the courts about specific cases? Do we share with advocates, but not with the courts? What should a center shield and what should it share? What documentation practices will make the best contribution to the safety of children and adult victims?

Each demonstration site took a critical look at its documentation practices, both as a component of its Safety Audit and part of the ongoing, cross-site discussions. This work contributed to the re-examination of intake practices and the shift to orientation, as described previously. In keeping with the shift in perspective to person-centered practices, some centers started taking more care to provide a sample of observation notes for parents, to be clear about what they would be paying attention to and reinforcing that there are no surprises about the center’s attention to domestic violence.

It also raised many questions about the creation and use of observation notes and the ways in which voluminous case files were often constructed around a family. As one director put it, “our files were either so overstuffed with information that it was hard to tell what was important and what wasn’t important,” or contained little or no explanation of the reason for and safety issues related to visitation or exchange for a particular family.

The historic and prevailing child welfare orientation of supervised visitation led to detailed and often lengthy accounts of parent-child interactions and descriptions of what children ate and wore and how they played, without any consideration of parenting in the context of battering. The following excerpt from a longer set of mock observation notes, using quotations from a variety of files across multiple centers, illustrates this approach.

VISIT #1 VP says hi to the children as they walk into the room... VP asks if they want McDonald’s next time. Both games end. VP asks if they want chicken nuggets. Child 1 plays with the sand. VP and Child 2 put the Stratego game away...

VISIT #4 VP arrived on time for visit...VP and children greeted each other with hugs and kisses...VP encouraged children to eat a balanced lunch, but they ended up eating a brownie and macaroni salad. They drank soda, but each only drank half a small mug...

VISIT #9 Children walk into room and say hello to VP. VP says hello and asks children how they are doing...All engage in appropriate conversation about beef jerky...All engage in appropriate conversation about family heritage...

Collections of such observations produced records of “good visits,” which many centers shared with courts. While such accounts may be warranted when there are specific concerns about someone’s ability to care for and interact with children, they have no bearing on visitation in the context of battering and risks to children and adult victims. The demonstration sites found numerous examples of observation notes and reports that read “good visit” or “exchange went well,” but where further digging through those overstuffed files showed that at the same time there was stalking-like behavior outside of the center and fearful victims. When a string of such observations becomes the basis of a report to the court, it becomes a potent recommendation, whether or not intended as such.

A closer look at observations notes across the Demonstration Initiative centers revealed that they carried many terms such as “realistic expectation” or “normal play” or “natural affection” or “appropriate.” These terms are easily read in ways that impose a specific cultural point of view. Across the demonstration sites, observation or visit forms were structured around assumptions that “appropriate” parenting meant a parent who was interacting and always in motion, with education games, reading, writing, and coloring readily available. How parents talk with children, express love, expect them to contribute to the family, and define and correct misbehavior all have cultural design and meaning. In one setting, a father who sits quietly with his daughter and says little as she leans against him may be described as an uninvolved, detached, and perhaps inappropriate parent who has had a “bad” visit. In another setting, where the monitor understands that this is a much-valued time and way of communicating between a father and daughter at the end of a day, it will be a “good” visit.


As the Demonstration Initiative came to a close, most of the participating visitation centers had shifted to a more restrained approach to observation notes, moving away from detailed attention to parent-child interactions and toward a record of who attended and any interruptions or interventions related to safety and security. Others have stayed closer to the video-like approach that includes an almost minute-by-minute account of the events and activities of the visit. There was a shift among several centers to include the reason for the referral in specific terms at the top of any reports or notes: *e.g., Domestic violence referral. Visitation ordered as part of a protection order which described four assaults against Ms. Smith in the six months prior to the visitation order. Coinciding with the visitation order, Mr. Smith was arrested and charged with misdemeanor battery against Ms. Smith and burglary of her residence.* In addition, any observation reports that are released in response to a subpoena or shared under a release of information carry a disclaimer: *Any behavior described in this document has occurred in an artificial, supervised setting and should in no way be used to infer what would happen in an unsupervised setting.*

“As little as possible” has become the watchword for documentation for many of the visitation centers in the Demonstration Initiative. With the recognition that there is no guarantee of confidentiality – and, anything written down about a victim’s fears, her plans to relocate, or a child’s reluctance to participate in a visit or exchange could be available to a battering partner – centers have gravitated toward a leaner approach to documentation. Nor are centers rushing to provide a steady stream of information to the courts. In their changing relationship with the courts and opportunities for discussion, some centers were surprised to learn that judges did not necessarily want a lengthy reconstruction of everything that

happened in a visit, but only that information that was pertinent to making a decision about someone's safety. One center director had a similar reason for not providing any kind of routine report on the referral to the court: "I want a report from our center to mean something, namely, 'this is dangerous behavior, pay attention'." Yet this approach also requires a court that understands the tactics of battering and is able to put seemingly innocuous behaviors, such as repeatedly arriving too early or too late, coming to the wrong door, or wearing particular cologne, into that deeper context. It connects back to the center's collaboration with the courts and wider community response.

Building in frequent staff discussions and case reviews have come to be seen as having as much to do with documentation as writing things down in this more spare approach to documentation. There is a practical need for staff to share information with one another, particularly to encourage consistent recognition of aspects of safety that are important in protecting individual victims. The pattern of writing everything down that the demonstration sites discovered in their case analysis grew in part as a response to this need for cross-staff communication. It serves a contrary purpose, however, when it becomes so detailed and voluminous that it cannot be quickly read or deciphered. Better to keep an ongoing general communication log, meet every two or three weeks to review every case and summarize aspects pertinent to safety, such as "walking CP to her car," and then eliminate the log.





Extensive cross-site work among the four sites and their technical assistance partners characterized the Demonstration Initiative’s exploration of confidentiality, record keeping, and information sharing practices. It involved numerous cross-site and individual site conversations, along with consultations with attorneys and court representatives. It is a still-evolving discussion, shaped by the following questions:

- Do visitation centers have any legal protections in holding information as confidential?
- What is the impact of legislation and legal requirements such as HIPPA and mandated child abuse reporting?
- From whom and where does a visitation center gather information? Why and with whom does it share information?
- What is the legal impact of utilizing electronic databases and other information, video and audio recordings, and photos?
- What is a “client file” and to whom and under what conditions can a center release information from it?
- What are the implications of different organizational structures for visitation services (i.e., free-standing agency, under an umbrella organization, or government entity) on how information is shared and protected? What should be the policy and practice when an employee in the same organization has two different roles (such as domestic violence victim advocate and visitation facilitator) and therefore has access to information that is not normally available or accessible to someone working in only one of the programs?

The Demonstration Initiative’s exploration of documentation practices has been much like an ever-changing puzzle. One new approach only raises more questions. For example, what should a center document when it adds regular safety check-ins and other contacts with victims of battering?



Strategies...

engaging community partners and the wider community

- ✓ Conduct a guided reading of several case files and ask these questions of each document and related process:
 - Who needs protection and what kind of protection?
 - Why complete this form or report? What is its purpose? How is it used?
 - Why is this question asked?
 - Who benefits from this information?
 - How can this information be used to harm those in need of protection?
 - Where does this form or report go from here and how is it used?
 - How is the information collected here related to protection and safety of child and adult victims of battering?

- ✓ Conduct a complete review of the legal parameters of confidential communication and documentation operating in the local jurisdiction

- ✓ Develop a clear, legally-sound policy around record keeping practices and the limits of confidentiality

- ✓ Define what and how information can be released, and who can receive it

- ✓ Develop a release of information process and document that allows the person granting it to determine:
 - [1] an expiration date and explanation of how to terminate the release before that date and how to extend it beyond that date;
 - [2] clear indication of to whom information can be released;
 - [3] what information can be released; and,
 - [4] how information can be released, such as phone, fax, personal delivery, or mail

- ✓ Develop a procedure to address the long-term security of information, including what records will be maintained at the conclusion of services and for how long, and what will be destroyed
- ✓ Address safety and other considerations around data storage (paper and electronic formats)
- ✓ Review and address how families are informed of the center's record-keeping practices and limitations of the protections in place
- ✓ Convene a panel of survivors and advocates and review the forms, brochures, and other documents that family members complete and that explain visitation services
 - Pay particular attention to how these documents are understood or misunderstood
 - Explore ways in which presentation or completion of the material addresses culture and identity
 - Discuss what the center should know about a survivor's experience and the best ways to gather that information



Strategies...
engaging community
partners and the
wider community,
continued...

SHIFTING SECURITY



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

Shifting Security

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

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

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

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





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

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

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



STRATEGIES...

TAKING A CRITICAL LOOK AT SECURITY

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



CHILDREN'S SAFETY



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

Children's Safety

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

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

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

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

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



STRATEGIES...

SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S SAFETY IN THE CONTEXT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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

A SPECTRUM OF SERVICES



“ *Visitation centers have always been about safety for children. The demonstration site and broader program discussions introduced safety of adult victims and repairing the harm caused by battering as equally legitimate goals of supervised visitation.* ”

A Spectrum of Services

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

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

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

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

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





ESSENTIAL DISCUSSIONS

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

As part of its role in the Demonstration Initiative, each site defined and shaped a question it wanted to explore, using the framework of the Safety Audit as the method of inquiry. Their questions and discoveries contributed greatly to the shifts in thinking and practice that have come to characterize the Supervised Visitation Program. From the vantage point of 2007, the questions taken together provide a set of essential discussions in thinking about how to provide safe ways for a battering parent to visit children without further harm to children or to an adult victim. In other words, any visitation and exchange program that seeks to account for battering and pay equal regard to safety must attend to these questions of defining its role, accounting for culture, building safety, and discovery of and access to its services.

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

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

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



SUMMING UP

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



DEMONSTRATION INITIATIVE SNAPSHOTS

...shifts in thinking

...shifts in practice

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

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

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

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

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



SNAPSHOT THE STATE OF MICHIGAN



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



The State of Michigan

Demonstration Initiative Snapshot

THE COMMUNITIES

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

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

LOCAL PROJECT COORDINATOR:

Betty Wright; succeeded by Renee Ingraham and Sarah Weber¹⁷

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGENCY PARTNER: *Aware, Inc.*

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

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

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

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES OF NORTHWEST

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

LOCAL PROJECT COORDINATOR:

April Ayers; succeeded by Mary Lou Williams

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGENCY PARTNER:

Women's Resource Center – Grand Traverse Area

COURT PARTNER: *13th Circuit Court; Antrim, Grand Traverse, and Leelanau Counties*

EVERY WOMAN'S PLACE: MUSKEGON COUNTY

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

LOCAL PROJECT COORDINATOR:

Barbara Olsen; succeeded by Crystal France

COURT PARTNER: *14th Circuit Court, Muskegon County*

HAVEN: OAKLAND COUNTY

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

LOCAL PROJECT COORDINATOR:

Tiffany Martinez; succeeded by Katalin Berdy

COURT PARTNER: *6th Circuit Court, Oakland County*



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

AN ESSENTIAL DISCUSSION

What is the role of a supervised visitation center?

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

They made the following discoveries:

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

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

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

SHIFTS IN THINKING AND PRACTICE

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

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

SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

NEEDS OF ADULT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THEIR CHILDREN

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

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

SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

NEEDS OF ADULT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THEIR CHILDREN

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

PARTNERSHIPS WITH BATTERED WOMEN'S ADVOCACY PROGRAM

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

SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

PARTNERSHIPS WITH BATTERED WOMEN'S ADVOCACY PROGRAM

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

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE COURTS

- Establish what information will be reported between the center and referring court before center accepts referrals
 - Duty to report to the court limits a center's ability to keep information confidential and risks abuser access to sensitive information
 - Family court decision makers must pay particular attention to risks related to joint custody and parenting time in cases involving domestic abuse
 - Court has the primary responsibility for assessment risk in domestic violence cases, with support from wider coordinated community response
 - Relationship between center and court should support a center's judgment if it cannot safely serve a family and not result in an order for parenting time under less secure circumstances
- √ Involve local judges in planning training (statewide and local)
 - √ Provide guidance and specific examples for understanding how joint custody (physical and/or legal) may be contrary to the best interests of the child in cases involving domestic abuse
 - √ Define role of judicial decision makers, including: promoting safety for children and abused parents; producing orders that minimize opportunities for continued abuse and that maximize protection of abused parents and children; establishing case management practices that minimize opportunities to use court proceedings as a vehicle of ongoing abuse.
 - √ Provide tools to help judicial decision makers assess parenting time arrangements and deny, order, or suspend protective conditions
 - √ "Transitions from supervised to unsupervised visitation should be made gradually, to allow the court to monitor for safety and to give the child and abused parent time to adjust"
 - √ Provide guidelines on optimizing the protections supervised visitation offers, e.g., craft orders with enough specificity to make them difficult to manipulate and enough flexibility to allow the center to accommodate them; avoid orders with automatic transitions to unsupervised parenting time
 - √ "Every report to the referring court should begin by reminding the court of the safety concern at issue for the family, and the limited context in which the visits occur"

SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

CULTURAL ACCESSIBILITY

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

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

CONSULTING COMMITTEES

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

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

SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

CONSULTING COMMITTEES

- Require a “job description” and active participation
 - Batterer intervention programs must be present and involved from beginning, but chosen with care as some fall short of creating an environment that fosters capacity and willingness to change
 - Coordinated community response needs to come to agreement on purpose of risk assessment, which system will conduct it, and how it will be conducted
 - “Supervised visitation centers and courts must work together within the local coordinated community effort to develop outside referral resources for more thorough screening, risk assessment, and safety planning”
 - Members of the coordinated community effort can help devise documentation policies that will promote safety and accountability
- Expand competent legal representation for victims of domestic abuse
 - Obtain and retain adequate financial support
 - √ Involve batterer intervention program partners that adhere, at minimum, to Michigan’s Batterer Intervention Standards
 - √ Define batterer intervention program role in context of supervised visitation, such as: assist in training staff, assist in devising safe policies and practices, assist in assessing level of danger in a case
 - √ “Anger management programs, drug/alcohol treatment, parenting skills classes, and other services that do not address the coercive, controlling use of violence should not be ordered in place of batterer intervention services for domestic violence perpetrators”
 - √ Encourage the Michigan Supervised Visitation Network to include courts and advocates

SECURITY MEASURES

- Key question: If it’s so unsafe that children must visit a parent in an incarceration type of atmosphere, should there be visitation at all?
 - Determining security measures that best fit an individual family’s needs begins with the court assessing risk prior to supervised visitation referral
 - Security needs are never static
 - “A supervised visitation center must exercise independent judgment in deciding whether it can safely accommodate a court-referral”
 - Security includes attention to information management issues around confidentiality and disclosure
- √ Attention to “whole community” risk assessment
 - √ Recommend approach to risk assessment that considers the abused parent’s perception of risk, the perpetrator’s behavior and attitudes, and factors related to the abused parent’s personal, social, and community circumstances
 - √ Recognize that many victims do not seek help in ways that leave a public record and documentation
 - √ Emphasize physical space, staggered arrival/departure, keypad access, cameras, and relationship with law enforcement over security guards and metal detectors
 - √ Forbid service of court papers (e.g., personal protection order, warrants) at visitation centers



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

SECURITY MEASURES

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

SUSTAINABILITY

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





SNAPSHOT SANTA CLARA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA



“ *Santa Clara County’s inquiry brought forward a recognition that a center can have “good visits” within the span of an hour or two, but noting “good visit” on report after report may reinforce a batterer’s attempt to engage the center in inadvertently supporting ongoing coercion and threats.* ”



Santa Clara County

Demonstration Initiative Snapshot

THE COMMUNITIES

Together the three counties participating in the Demonstration Initiative have a combined population of over 2.5 million (between Houston and Chicago, in comparison, if they were one city) and land area of 2,185 square miles. While they share an adjacent geography, the counties range widely in population. San Mateo County is over six times as large as Santa Cruz County. Populations of their major cities range from just over 50,000 in Santa Cruz to 92,000 in San Mateo and nearly 900,000 in San Jose.

Santa Clara County has the largest and most urban population density, as well as over three hundred thousand acres in agricultural production and over six hundred farms producing harvested crops. Agriculture brings migrant workers to both Santa Clara and Santa Cruz Counties (the latter because of its proximity to Monterey County and the Salinas Valley). The 2000 Census provides the following data about county residents' primary racial and ethnic identities and language spoken at home.

American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities range from 0.1% to 1.3% of the population across the three counties. In San Mateo County, the largest Asian communities are Chinese (6.9%) and Filipino (8.3%). In Santa Clara, largest Asian communities are Asian Indian (4%), Chinese (6.9%), Filipino (4.5%), and Vietnamese (5.9%). In each county, nearly a quarter of the population identifies as Hispanic or Latino. Santa Cruz County has the highest percentage of families with children under age eighteen living below the official poverty level (11.1%), followed by Santa Clara (6.8%) and San Mateo (4.9%). This compares to a rate for California of 14.3%.

Santa Clara County administered the Supervised Visitation Program Demonstration Initiative grant through its Office of the County Counsel. Local project directors also served as directors of their respective visitation centers: Beth McNamara in San Mateo and Jennifer Rose in Santa Cruz.

The centers had experience working together prior to the Demonstration Initiative as part of a five-county collaboration known as Safe Connections for Kids, funded by the California Office of the Courts to provide safe access and exchange in the South Bay Area. The Demonstration Initiative involved key community partners among the courts and domestic violence advocacy organizations.

County	Population	Hispanic or Latino (any race)	White	African American	Asian	Speak another language other than English at home
Santa Cruz	255,602	26.8%	75.1%	1%	3.4%	27.8%
San Mateo	707,161	21.9%	59.5%	3.5%	20%	41.5%
Santa Clara	1,682,585	24%	57.6%	2.8%	25.6%	45.4%
California	36,457,585	35.2%	77%	6.7%	12.2%	17.9%



SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

- Santa Cruz Safe Connections for Kids, a program of the Walnut Avenue Women’s Center, a domestic violence victim services agency
- Walnut Avenue Women’s Center
- Santa Cruz County Superior Court and Family Court Services

SAN MATEO COUNTY

- Family Visitation Center, a program of Family Service Agency of San Mateo County, a human services agency
- C.O.R.A., a domestic violence victim services agency
- San Mateo County Superior Court and Family Court Services

SANTA CLARA COUNTY

- Family Access Program of Santa Clara County, a program of Community Solutions, a human services agency (to 2005)
- Next Door Solutions to Domestic Violence
- Santa Clara County Superior Court and Family Court Services

Community Solutions of Santa Clara County decided to withdraw its participation when the organization closed its supervised visitation center in 2005. Next Door Solutions to Domestic Violence stepped in as the new supervised visitation partner. Next Door Solutions is a domestic violence victim services agency that had been a collaborating partner in the Demonstration Initiative.¹⁹

19. A fourth visitation center and community, Community Human Services of Monterey County, participated in the initiative early on, but withdrew after the court partner was unable to remain involved at the level required by the Office on Violence Against Women.

AN ESSENTIAL DISCUSSION

How does the work of a visitation center produce or not produce safety for everyone involved?

As part of the Demonstration Initiative, the Santa Clara County collaborating partners and the Supervised Visitation Program’s national technical assistance partners (Praxis International and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges) conducted a Safety Audit.²⁰ The centers and their community partners wanted to learn more about how safety was defined, shaped, and acknowledged in visitation and exchange services.

One center director summed up their exploration of safety in this way: “I think it was a surprise to us, the extent to which philosophy around this issue didn’t hold true to practice around the work [of supervised visitation and exchange]. We can talk about being here to keep victims and children safe, but our thinking didn’t go through to how the work impacts victim safety.”

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

The Santa Clara County visitation programs made the following discoveries when they examined whether and how supervised visitation was organized around equal regard for the safety of children and adult victims.

- The visitation centers received incomplete information from judges and custody evaluators about the level of potential danger
- Families using the visitation center did not always understand the safety precautions put in place around arrivals, departures, and visits
- The work of visitation monitors was not organized to fully account for battering behaviors and how those might be used to engage the center in inadvertently colluding with the battering parent
- The visitation centers collected and recorded a large volume of information without a clear sense of its purpose or importance to safety and risk in the context of battering
- The visitation centers did not have an ongoing, active dialogue with the parent who had been battered, or with the children or the battering parent
- Monitor training, preparation, and skill level sometimes left monitors inadequately prepared for supervision and exchange cases involving battering
- Community-based advocates, batterer intervention programs, and visitation centers were poorly linked
- The role of the visitation center in relation to post-separation violence and safety had not been clearly articulated or explored

Santa Clara County’s inquiry brought forward a recognition that a center can have “good visits” within the span of an hour or two, but noting “good visit” on report after report may reinforce a batterer’s attempt to engage the center in inadvertently supporting ongoing coercion and threats. Not a single staff member in any visitation center wanted to be in that position. Above all, they recognized that there can be no single, predetermined safety plan that fits every victim of battering walking through a center’s doors. Locks and bolts will be important to some victims’ safety and well-being, but so will knowing whether or not a violent partner has been arrested between one visit and the next or whether the final divorce hearing has been scheduled.

SHIFTS IN THINKING AND PRACTICE

The following table presents highlights of Santa Clara County’s work, but should not be read as capturing the full breadth and depth of their work or every dimension of change within the demonstration project and the Supervised Visitation Program. It reviews seven areas of exploration and change that were the focus of the larger initiative: meeting the needs of adult and child victims, partnerships with domestic violence advocates, relationships with the courts, cultural accessibility, consulting committees, security measures, and sustainability.

Santa Clara County benefited from their existing collaboration and experience working together. The project capitalized on the commitment and participation of its local consulting committee to expand the wider community response to and understanding of supervised visitation in the context of domestic violence. “Keep bringing everyone to the table,” is a unanimous recommendation by all partners: visitation centers, domestic violence advocacy programs, and courts.

This collected work produced a set of revised forms and procedures related to court referrals, client registration and orientation, observation notes, client check-ins, and reports back to the court. Across this process the project partners sought to:

- make the changing safety needs of each family more visible;
- emphasize building positive, respectful relationships with family members from the very first contact;
- tie observations and reporting to safety and ongoing coercion and control (rather than documentation of routine parent-child interactions);
- articulate the limitations of inferring future safety from the controlled environment of supervised visitation or exchange; and,
- improve working relationships between the centers and the courts.

The Santa Clara County Demonstration Initiative also created a common statement of mission, philosophy, and principles to guide parents and the centers. “We believe: every person has the right to a safe environment free from violence; that our community has a responsibility to ensure safety for all family members; and, that people have the potential to grow and deserve the opportunity to develop their strengths over their weaknesses.”

As the Demonstration Initiative came to a close, the collaborative partners found sustainability to be among their greatest challenges. All three visitation centers experienced a significant turnover in staff and leadership. In the local evaluation, partners cited securing stable financial resources and staff as ongoing challenges. The umbrella organizations for the centers in Santa Clara and Santa Cruz, both domestic violence service agencies, decided to close the centers. The changes left the collaborative partners regrouping to determine how best to continue the work of the initiative and provide visitation services in those communities that reflected the new philosophy and practice.





SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

NEEDS OF ADULT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THEIR CHILDREN

- Awareness of complex needs and ways in which batterers can continue harassment by using the center, court process, or the financial burden of ongoing litigation
- “It’s not just about protecting the children and the victim while they are using the center. The safety and planning precautions need to happen outside the center.”
- Significance of post-separation issues and safety needs of adult victims
- “We moved away from the community belief that centers exist solely to provide fathers’ access to children.”
- Recognition that many adult victims saw visitation as a “service to support batterers” rather than a service to support their safety
- “Understanding safety as something more dynamic and changing, and not static”
- “Invest in battered women and children so they can be more active in informing the work of visitation centers, the courts, and DV programs.”
- Recognition that not every child wants contact with parent or parents
- Recognition that supervised visitation services are not suitable for every batterer
- Recognition that some batterers can change how they parent, and visitation center can help support that change
- Requires examining, developing, and implementing policies and programming to respond to victims of battering who are the visiting parent
 - Examine how institutional responses create these situations, including court’s role and legal constraints in decision-making

- √ Ongoing conversation and “purposeful, intentional time to spend checking in” with all family members
 - Requires attention to documentation and handling information that might compromise victim safety
- √ Increase attention to victims’ fears
- √ New approach to orientations: emphasis on conversation and relationship-building
 - Administrative details, demographic information, information requested by funding sources, etc. on form completed in advance
 - First appointment can focus on understanding fears and expectations around visitation services
 - More attention to unique safety needs
- √ Met challenge of batterers calling law enforcement when a child refused to visit by engaging law enforcement agencies and the courts to create child-friendly policies and protocols
- √ Visitation center staff on-site at the court to explain services, assist in completing the necessary registration paperwork, schedule orientation, and be available to ease anxiety about visitation or exchange
- √ Link women, men and children with ancillary services and resources, such as support groups around battering and parenting issues
- √ Establish advisory councils for adult victims and children to help guide visitation practices
- √ Ground center practices in the broad and diverse experiences of battered women
- √ Develop more flexibility around children who do not want to visit



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

NEEDS OF ADULT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THEIR CHILDREN

- Develop a local response when visitation staff feel using visitation center services compromises the safety of survivors and/or children
 - Understanding and protocol
 - Communicating the center concerns to the court
 - Court’s options and response
- Develop programming to support victims

- Take more time to talk and work with child before services begin and before and after every visit/exchange
- Parents agree to center principles, including: “We refrain from forcing children to do anything before, during, or after the visit that makes them uncomfortable. This includes – but is not limited to – participating in a visit/exchange when they do not want to...”
- Prepare parents for visits to support process and help make visitation successful
- Work with court to develop protocol and understanding of steps center takes to support children
- Parents and children may need to meet with staff and come to the center multiple times before visits begin

PARTNERSHIP WITH BATTERED WOMEN’S ADVOCACY PROGRAMS

- Meeting the ideals of the Demonstration Initiative requires building a partnership between the visitation center and advocacy programs
- Requires time, work, and effort: visitation and advocacy programs are isolated from one another, even when in the same agency
- A visitation center should not be the strongest advocacy voice in a community
- Much remains to be done in understanding the different types of domestic violence
 - DV agencies see more battering (i.e., ongoing pattern of coercion and control)
 - Courts see more kinds of violence between intimate partners

- ✓ Provide an advocate to be available to and work with victims at the visitation center
- ✓ Cross training and cross problem-solving between visitation centers and advocacy programs
- ✓ Work closer on a day-to-day basis
- ✓ “Case consultation and regular team meetings assist in enhancing everyone’s knowledge, understanding, and capacity to best serve families”
 - Requires attention to confidentiality issues and limitations to put in place related to confidentiality



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

PARTNERSHIP WITH BATTERED WOMEN'S ADVOCACY PROGRAMS

- “We need to create an advocacy institute, perhaps, to provide post-separation advocacy and to find out what women really need and want. Where does she want to talk about what’s going on? It might be at the beauty shop or housing center or WIC [nutrition] program.”

- √ Provide advocacy and support for battered women around the long-term consequences of living with battering and its impact on parenting
 - Not the role of a visitation center
 - Must come through community-based programs
- √ Visitation center can provide a place to talk with someone or use a computer during that one hour while her children are visiting with their father

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE COURTS

- Requires building relationships with court staff as well as judges
- Understanding that clear communication between the courts and visitation centers benefits everyone
- “We worked more closely with DV agencies and with the visitation agencies that we would have without this project.”
- Shift to new forms and processes is a long process, from discussion and drafting to getting staff used to new ways of working
- Incomplete court referrals impact safety and security
- Develop a local response when visitation staff feel that terminating visits would move a court to unsupervised visits and thereby compromise the safety of survivors and/or children

- √ Examine and resolve understanding of what can be shared with visitation center, under what circumstances, and how
- √ Establish new referral process
 - Distinguish reason for referral (i.e., domestic violence related or other)
 - Highlight “impressions, allegations or evidence of risk”
- √ Establish new court report process that emphasizes the reason for referral and conduct that impacts safety before, during, and after a visit or exchange
- √ Shift in relationships between center staff, courts, and family court services: ongoing meetings, education, cross training
- √ Ongoing cross training so that relationships and information are not lost during staff turnover



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE COURTS

- Understanding and protocol
- Communicating the center’s concerns
- Court’s options and response
- Understanding that visitation centers do not have a legal way to protect information and ensure confidentiality
- Explore documentation practices with the court
 - Impact of documentation
 - How the court uses center documentation
 - Unintended consequences
- Explore assumptions that a batterer’s visits at the center will probably go without incident at the center (“good behavior” at a center does not mean that battering behavior is no longer a concern)
- Examine how to communicate battering behavior that occurs at the center to the court, and the impact such information can have

- √ Develop ways for court staff and visitation staff to experience each other’s work: “see the world from another perspective” or “walk in each other’s shoes” and understand the dilemmas and constraints each other face in responding to domestic violence
- √ Build opportunities and training for judges and court staff to examine how to determine
 - Who is danger from whom and in what ways
 - When supervised visitation or exchange is safe and when it is not
 - Length of supervision and process of safe transition to unsupervised access
 - Options when supervised visitation or exchange is not safe

CULTURAL ACCESSIBILITY

- Integrate into philosophy and programming: “it can’t be a special training topic once every six months”
- Cannot be limited to language translation
- Cannot be limited to visitation center, but extend to courts, domestic violence agencies, and other community interveners
- Impact of high cost of living in region on hiring and retaining bilingual, bicultural staff
- Ensure that center is responsive to the background, circumstances, and cultures of the communities and families being served

- √ Create satellite sites for safe visitation and exchange services to under-served communities (single location can limit accessibility)
- √ “Find systems and funding to support on-going feedback and input from diverse women and children”
- √ Increase bilingual, bicultural staff that is representative of the community
- √ Develop policy and guidelines based on input and from diverse communities



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

CONSULTING COMMITTEES

- Determine who is not being served and consult with specific communities to develop a culturally respectful program
- Explore alternative models of and approaches to supervised visitation
 - A “center” or its current design might not be the safest and best way to ensure safety for battered women and their children in every community
- “We were able to tap into the expertise of many of our consulting committee members to provide overall guidance into the work and to help us think through very specific issues, such as confidentiality and record keeping, documentation, and the court referral form”
- Reinforce visitation services as part of overall response to domestic violence
- Visitation practices must be linked with and integral to coordinated community response
- Difficult to maintain understanding and momentum around integration of visitation services and response to domestic violence at all levels of each partner agency and system
 - Requires participation and action beyond individual members of a consulting committee
- Collaboration enhances overall understanding and attention to domestic violence and increased safety and sensitivity for adult victims
- Collaboration and coordinated community response are essential to realizing the philosophy and goals of the Supervised Visitation Program in building visitation services that account for battering and domestic violence
- Moved too quickly in establishing consulting committee, before developing a clear sense of the Demonstration Initiative’s needs

- √ Provide opportunities for visitation participants and members of their wider communities to advise center on how to increase its outreach, service capacity, and accessibility to diverse communities
 - Focus groups
 - Interviews
 - Surveys
 - Community forums
- √ Involve a greater number of people in each participating system in planning and implementation
 - Avoid isolating changes in one or two practitioners in a single agency or system
 - Include participation from “front-line” workers, as well as administrators and policy-makers
 - Drawn on the collaboration to hold specialized trainings
 - Use the collaboration to build buy-in, support, and recognition of united goal in building safety for victims of battering and their children
 - “Keep bringing everyone to the table”



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

SECURITY MEASURES

- “We realized that centers were creating the safety and security plan for every client in the same ways. Individual needs around safety and security were not accounted for.”
- Requires ongoing conversations with women, men, and children in order to respond and adjust security as needed
- Staff perceptions of security needs may differ from a victim’s perceptions of her needs
- “Partnership with local police, staff training and support, and support from other service providers are all just as important because the security of the clients before and after a visit is sometimes harder to achieve than during the visit.”
- Often greater needs around safety and security in supervised exchanges rather than visits
- “At least during visitation, the center can help keep the children safe. In exchanges, a batterer can continue to intimidate the children and put them in the middle.”
- Security measures build staff confidence that they are in a protected environment
- Security measures tell victims that the center takes domestic violence seriously and is aware that it can occur anywhere
- Ongoing brainstorming with grant partners and the consulting committee and training helps identify security problems
- Important to build in ways for those using the center to contribute to discussions about safety and security (e.g., ongoing check-ins, focus groups)
- Courts, police, and centers need to work out response around termination of visitation services

- √ “It was a collaborative decision that our centers would not have on-site security guards, metal detectors, or hand wands.”
 - Consider impact of policing and heavy surveillance approach on communities and people’s experiences with institutions, particularly criminal legal system
 - Reliance on guards and metal detectors can be a false sense of security
- √ Diminish staff’s ongoing conversation and consultation with victims about their specific safety needs over time and
- √ Diminish attention to batterer’s concerns and responses around his former partner and children (e.g., a final divorce action, which increases risk)
 - Emphasis on building respectful relationships in ways that promote communication, identify ongoing safety needs, and reduce batterer hostility and aggression
 - Wide array of less intrusive security measures available, such as:
 - Automatic locking doors
 - More secure barriers between waiting rooms
 - Audio and/or video in parking areas, entrances, exits, waiting and visitation areas
 - Panic buttons
 - Intercom system
 - Increased lighting
 - Partnerships with local law enforcement
 - Staff training and awareness of how to treat people with compassion and respect



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

SECURITY MEASURES

- Address cases where center is holding back on a termination action based on fear that court will respond in an inappropriate way (i.e., grantless supervised access)
- Requires law enforcement representation on consulting committee

- √ Conduct a thoughtful, thorough evaluation of the center’s safety and security needs
- √ Develop a way to have ongoing conversations about safety and security concerns
- √ New approach to orientations with noncustodial parents seems to reduce aggression toward staff
- √ Link battering parents with specialized classes on impact of battering on children
- √ Provide free support groups for victims and their children as a way to improve services, including security measures
- √ Use adult victim and children’s advisory councils to help identify security needs
- √ Expand services to enable center to provide transportation for visits or exchanges, according to safety issues for specific families
- √ Build a secure outdoor setting for visits
- √ Provide cell phones to high-risk participants
- √ Connect victims with legal assistance to help examine options
- √ Notify law enforcement if services have been terminated for safety reasons so that battering parent can’t manipulate police into facilitating an exchange or visit
 - Message from court to police: “Don’t enforce the order. I want to see them back in court if the visitation center has terminated services”



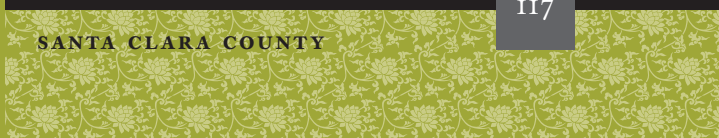
SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

SUSTAINABILITY

- “Supervised visitation is now seen as a way in which each community responds to domestic violence and is seen as a valued post-separation service”
- Recognition across the collaboration of how centers struggle with the cost of providing services and how limited funding affects what they can offer
- Requires creating partnerships that can pull resources together
- Requires that advocacy community take up visitation as a critical post-separation issue and service for battered women
- Visitation services are not viable long range without state and federal subsidy
- Challenge to find funding streams with similar goals and missions that does not compromise the philosophical approach to the work
- “Our greatest challenge is that the need for safe visitation and exchange services exceeds our fiscal capability to accommodate everyone”

- √ Available to all who need visitation services regardless of financial situation
- √ Subsidize visitation so that children can spend more time with supervised parent
- √ Provide guidance and ways for visitation services to communicate program effectiveness, the value of their work, and the ways in which visitation services support the larger community response to domestic violence
- √ Develop strong community support for services
- √ Develop strong and efficient personnel and fiscal management, support all personnel as effective communicators of program services
- √ Determine the fiscal and social impact (direct and indirect) of the program on other systems and organizations in your community





SNAPSHOT THE CITY OF CHICAGO



“ Each of the Chicago centers is grounded in a parent agency with a culturally-specific history and perspective, experience they brought to the examination of visitation services in a large, diverse urban community. ”



The City of Chicago

Demonstration Initiative Snapshot

THE COMMUNITY

With just under three million people, Chicago is the third largest city in the country. As reported in the 2000 Census, 21.7% of its residents were foreign born and 35.5% speak a language other than English at home. In recognition of this diversity, voting information has been translated into the top fifteen languages other than English spoken in the homes of Chicago public school students. As part of “The Great Migration” in the first half of the 20th century, hundreds of thousands of African Americans settled in Chicago, building the base for one of the country’s strongest African American communities, and nearly 37% of the city’s current population. In the last census, 26% of city residents identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino, and Chicago is the second largest Polish city in the world, outside of Warsaw. Immigration has been a significant factor in population growth in the wider metropolitan area, with the leading countries including Mexico, Poland, and India. Immigrants come with extraordinary diversity of experience, tradition, education, literacy, English proficiency, and income.

According to the 2000 Census, nearly 17% of Chicago families live below the official poverty level, including over 40% of the female householders with children under age eighteen. While nearly a third of renters pay more than 35% of their income for housing, 20% pay more than half. According to the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, only 10% of the affordable housing need is currently met. Almost 45% of

homeless residents are families with children. Each of the three Chicago visitation and exchange centers is located within a larger organization that was founded with a specific cultural identity. They brought this experience to the Demonstration Initiative.

APNA GHAR (OUR HOME) was founded in 1989 to provide support and services to women experiencing domestic violence who came from the countries of India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. It sought to provide a place where women and their children could find help in ways that acknowledged their languages, dress, foods, religions, family structures, and values. It now provides a crisis line, shelter, counseling, translation, legal advocacy, housing and employment assistance, and supervised child visitation. Apna Ghar is located in the top 'port of entry' for new immigrants to Chicago. Over 43% of the population in its zip code area speaks a language other than English at home.

THE BRANCH FAMILY INSTITUTE (BRANCH) grew from E.M. Branch & Associates, Inc., a clinical practice established to provide culturally relevant services to African American individuals, families, and communities. The non-profit institute was founded to expand counseling services to low-income families. Branch seeks to account for the impact of poverty, racism, and oppression in the lives of the people it works with. In 2002, the Chicago Department of Human Services contracted with Branch to begin operating a supervised visitation center.



MUJERES LATINAS EN ACCIÓN (MUJERES) is located in one of the largest Mexican communities in the United States. It describes itself as a “bilingual/bicultural agency.” Over the past thirty years, it has developed support for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, including crisis intervention, a 24-hour crisis line, counseling, legal advocacy, and housing assistance. It also provides free childcare for parents using the agency’s services. In 2001, Mujeres began to provide supervised visitation services after another agency in the community ceased operation.

The Chicago Supervised Visitation Program Demonstration Initiative grant was administered by the city’s Department of Human Services. Staff from the Mayor’s Office on Domestic Violence served as project directors: Beth Chaplin, Leslie Landis, and Emily Muskovitz. The visitation centers’ were represented primarily by Bob Gallenbach, Apna Ghar; Helena Sugano, Mujeres Latinas en Acción; and, Brenda Thompson, Branch Family Institute.

The Demonstration Initiative also involved community partners among the courts, domestic violence advocacy organizations, and other members participating in the project’s local consulting committee. Members included representatives from the judiciary in the Cook County Circuit Court Domestic Relations Division, Cook County Court Marriage and Family Counseling Services, Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Chicago Department of Human Services, Chicago Department of Public Health, Chicago Police Department, Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women’s Network, YWCA Children’s Rise Center, La Familia Unida, and Life Span’s domestic violence legal services program.

AN ESSENTIAL DISCUSSION

How does culture play a role in serving families using supervised visitation?

As part of the Demonstration Initiative, the Chicago centers and the Supervised Visitation Program's national technical assistance partners (Praxis International and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges) conducted a Safety Audit to explore how visitation services account for peoples' cultures and identities.²¹

The Chicago partners recognized that at one level their question had a ready and simple answer: of course "culture" plays a role in supervised visitation.²² Everything a visitation center does and every aspect of its organization has cultural dimensions and impact. There is no visitation center or service that is culturally neutral. Chicago wanted to examine the complexity of accounting for people's unique cultures and identities, however, and to explore ways of thinking about these aspects of supervised visitation. That led to the idea of *cultural humility* as a life-long commitment to self-evaluation, self-critique, and advocacy partnerships with communities.²³

Chicago offered examples of cultural humility in action, with the caveat that any such measures are only taken in the **context of safety for adult victims and their children.**

- Define a clear identity that is separate from the court
- Structure adequate time and flexibility into all interactions with children and parents
- Invite diverse community organizations to walk through the center's space and procedures and provide a critique
- Prepare center staff to work with battering parents
- Use staff meetings, ad hoc work groups, community members, and parents to help examine every aspect of the center's design and the implied and explicit messages about who is welcome and how they are valued
- Prepare staff to support parents and children to lead with the language of their choice
- Provide opportunities for extended family to be involved

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

22. From the Chicago Safety Audit report, *A Discussion of Accounting for Culture in Supervised Visitation Practices*: "What do we mean by *culture*? It is easy to equate culture with race or ethnicity, and stop there; or, to see it as a set of fixed, stable patterns of belief and behavior. *Culture* is the complex, symbolic frame of reference shared by a group of people. It takes in the totality of world view, behavior patterns, art, beliefs, language, institutions, and other products of human work and thought. Its many aspects are dynamic, diverse, and often misperceived by those inside and outside the group. It is contradictory, carrying values that can be both oppressive and nurturing at the same time. Culture develops and continues to evolve in relation to changing social and political contexts, based on race, ethnicity, national origin, sexuality, gender, religion, age, class, disability status, immigration status, education, geography, special interests, and time. A person's cultural identity is multi-faceted, with elements that are clear, ambiguous, changing, and sometimes contradictory. A person can claim multiple cultural locations and intersections.

23. Melanie Tervalon and Jann Murray-García. 1998. Cultural Humility Versus Cultural Competence: A Critical Distinction in Defining Physician Training Outcomes in Multicultural Education. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, 9:2, 117-125. For Tervalon and Murray-García the qualities of cultural "humility" include respect, dialogue, awareness, and reflection. While their article centers on health care, the Chicago centers found that the authors' discussion of cultural humility resonated with how the centers' approach their work.

- Hold an all-center gathering to help bridge cultures and contribute to an atmosphere of warmth and respect for families
- Support families' food, music, and religious traditions
- Build processes for expanding the center's understanding of families' experiences with the courts, police, Social Security, welfare, medical, psychology, and other intervening institutions, both individually and historically

The Chicago partners recognized that asking this question is only the beginning of the discussion. There is no single answer, no one-dimensional response. It prompts many other questions to pursue in that practice of ongoing study, self-reflection, and partnership. What culture dominates? How do visitation services account for indigenous cultures and ways of knowing? How can we make supervised visitation and exchange an experience with minimal barriers? How can we make supervised visitation welcoming, respectful, and aware of the lives of everyone who comes through the door? How might the idea of safe visitation and exchange look without the physical space of a center? How can we facilitate families' cultural identities, as well as accommodate them? How would protective or monitored contact between a child and a parent look for different cultures, if they could figure it out from the ground up?

SHIFTS IN THINKING AND PRACTICE

The exploration of cultural accessibility described above was a hallmark of Chicago's participation in the Demonstration Initiative. The following table presents other highlights, but should not be read as capturing the full breadth and depth of Chicago's work or every dimension of change within the demonstration project and the Supervised Visitation Program. It reviews seven areas of exploration and change that were the focus of the larger initiative: meeting the needs of adult and child victims, partnerships with domestic violence advocates, relationships with the courts, cultural accessibility, consulting committees, security measures, and sustainability.

Two of the three Chicago visitation centers were programs of domestic violence service agencies, which meant that all of the visitation center staff had completed the forty-hour training that advocates and volunteers working with victims also receive. That removes an additional step in integrating supervised visitation services into the continuum of domestic violence victim services and the overall coordinated community response.

The Chicago Demonstration Initiative, with support from the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, conducted training involving the forty-plus members of the domestic relations court judiciary. With the exception of a few judges held back for emergency court proceedings or other commitments, the entire family court bench participated. Chicago paid particular attention to “maintaining a respectful yet independent relationship between the centers and the court system,” while building an understanding of the scope and role of supervised visitation and exchange in domestic violence cases. It also emphasized integrating visitation services into the wider coordinated community response to domestic violence as a significant part of sustained advocacy and safety for battered women and their children.

Each of the Chicago centers is grounded in a parent agency with a culturally-specific history and perspective, experience they brought to the examination of visitation services in a large, diverse urban community. The reality of providing supervised visitation and exchange has been that each center serves families from multiple ethnic and cultural backgrounds, although this is less true for *Mujeres* than for the other centers. In a congested urban setting, parents are eager to minimize travel time and expenses, whether traveling via public transportation or private vehicle, and often seek visitation services closest to their home or children’s school. The distance between *Apna Ghar* and Branch Family Institute, for example, is twenty-two miles. While Chicago is the third largest city in the country, the three centers are the only supervised visitation programs in the city providing services specific to domestic violence. The services are also provided free of charge.

As the Demonstration Initiative concluded, the Chicago centers had doubled their service capacity, using the federal Supervised Visitation Program grant to expand beyond initial city support from Chicago Community Development Block Grant funds. Advocacy and support from the local project coordinator, the Mayor’s Office on Domestic Violence (MODV), helped develop new sources of financial support for the three visitation centers, including: Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, Illinois Violence Prevention Authority, Chicago Department of Children and Youth, and a private foundation. MODV is coordinating an effort to secure more long range stability via a permanent and earmarked source of state revenue, both to support services in Chicago and encourage expansion of the philosophy and practices of the Demonstration Initiative statewide.



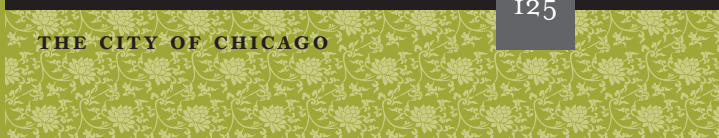
SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

NEEDS OF ADULT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THEIR CHILDREN

- Services must be community-specific and cannot be one-size-fits-all
- Rethinking confidentiality and limitations of state law
 - Assumed more confidentiality for visitation centers than exists
 - Recognition that communications with client families and services provided were not confidential
 - Impact on documentation, court forms, safety check-ins
- First contact is “an important and irreplaceable part” in developing positive relationships between centers and families, with an impact on services that follow at every juncture
- Victims of domestic violence do not necessarily perceive visitation centers and services as positive
 - Victims see center as primarily for the abusive parent, not victim parent
- Require ongoing attention to noncustodial victim parents and their advocacy and service needs

- √ Impact of confidentiality limitations
 - Requires guidelines for obtaining and sharing client information
 - Safety check-ins with victims between visit and attention to what happens with that information
 - “Documentation cut back dramatically”
 - Limit detailed narrative in notes
 - Create separate files for each person rather than a “family” file
- √ “Work around how, when, and realities of parents getting to the center. Now part of safety planning: How are you going to get here, what bus? Buying bus passes, locating cab fare...”
- √ Conversational approach to first appointments (i.e., “intake”), with time to explain program and its concepts
 - Emphasize “open dialogue”
 - De-emphasize filling out a form as goal
- √ Explore on-site ancillary community services that may be helpful to each family member
- √ Consider services in alternative locations, such as home environment, mall, park (while addressing safety considerations)
- √ Expand visitation centers’ knowledge of local laws regarding divorce and custody



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

PARTNERSHIPS WITH BATTERED WOMEN'S ADVOCACY PROGRAMS

- Visitation services are part of sustained advocacy and safety for adult victims and their children
- Advocacy related to post-separation violence is not the visitation center's role
- Victims being served by supervised visitation have not been those served by battered women's programs
- Requires thinking about advocacy in many settings and many ways, e.g., connection with faith communities, health care providers
- Recognition that advocates saw a center's very existence as creating the opportunity for colluding with a batterer to further coercion and control, by providing direct access to the children and ultimately to their mother
- Effective partnership requires funding sources for visitation services that do not diminish support for advocacy services
- Large task in a major urban setting with as many domestic violence service related agencies
- Meeting victims' needs tied to providing legal representation and links through advocacy programs

- ✓ Infuse Safe Havens (Supervised Visitation Program) concepts into the advocacy community's work
- ✓ Include visitation centers as a referral source in Chicago Domestic Violence Help Line database
- ✓ Establish cross referrals between domestic violence agencies and visitation centers
- ✓ Visitation center staff complete 40-hour domestic violence training
- ✓ Watch for ways in which advocacy and visitation center roles start to blur
- ✓ "Although centers can't be direct advocates, we can advocate for the prevention of domestic violence."
- ✓ Requires increasing the capacity of visitation centers if domestic violence agencies are to routinely recommend that victims use visitation services
- ✓ Contract with domestic violence legal service for case consultation
- ✓ Cross training between visitation centers and domestic violence advocates, visitation centers and legal services

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE COURTS

- "Centers best service their clients by maintaining a respectful and independent relationship from the court system, while partnering with the courts to ensure appropriate referrals, understanding of the centers' service capacities, and safety of domestic violence victims."
- Integrate visitation services into options and remedies available to the court in cases involving domestic violence

- ✓ Expand court's understanding of the visitation center's role in refusing and terminating cases and crafting a safe judicial response
- ✓ Develop court referral form that provides necessary information about a family and the reason for the referral
- ✓ Conduct training on supervised visitation and domestic violence issues for entire domestic relations court



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE COURTS

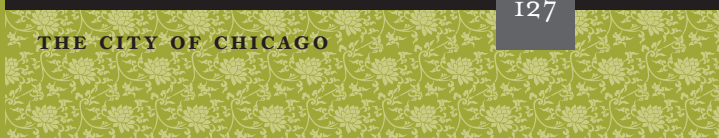
- Requires court understanding of the scope of visitation services
- Build court understanding that “supervised visits that occur without incident do not necessarily indicate that a noncustodial parent should be granted unsupervised visitation or exchanges”

- √ Centers will not provide routine reports to the courts; reports generated only at request of parties/clients
- √ Develop a court reporting form and process to address
 - Communicating center’s determination that a case is too dangerous for visitation services or child is too distressed
 - Avoiding judicial response that grants unsupervised visitation in response

CULTURAL ACCESSIBILITY

- A center’s physical setting and security are intertwined
 - “It’s important to stress the concept of community-based sites, versus housed in a legal facility, courthouse, or police station”
 - A stronger policing type atmosphere (i.e., armed guards and metal detectors) may reinforce experiences of oppression for some communities
- Requires ongoing reflection and study of visitation center’s design and practices, both deliberate and less intentional
- Identify and name the steps in providing services that are culturally respectful and culturally relative
- Recognition of wider need for interpretation services beyond the center already providing them
- “Many cultural and ethnic communities do not seek out supervised visitation and exchange services, which is a particular concern within a city that is so diverse”

- √ Design security measures that do not rely on armed guards and metal detectors
- √ Change observation practices and forms to exclude cultural assumptions about “appropriate” affection, play, and other aspects of parent and child interactions
- √ Establish an identity separate from the court
- √ See additional examples in the previous section of the snapshot, “An essential discussion,” on the Chicago Demonstration Initiative’s exploration of accounting for culture in supervised visitation practices





SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

CONSULTING COMMITTEES

- Integrate visitation centers and Safe Havens philosophy into existing community collaboration
- Use to inform the Demonstration Initiative, including new approaches to documentation and forms, protocols and procedures
- Key benefit is improved understanding of each agency's function and the scope of services provided by the visitation centers
- Role in developing financial stability for visitation services that maintain and expand the philosophy and practices of the Demonstration Initiative

- √ Bring center directors onto larger coordinated community response council
- √ Provide an avenue for comprehensive training to centers on relevant family law and immigration
- √ Bring court system and supervised visitation programs to the same forum and promote change of information, ideas, and discussions of the ways in which they interact and coexist
- √ Provide training to systems represented on the local consulting committee, such as training on custody and visitation in domestic violence cases to court mediation unit, or training to police on visitation center practices
- √ Develop a working relationship that allows each system to maintain its separate identity, e.g., courts and visitation centers able to work together while the centers maintain individual identity as an independent, non-court-based service
- √ Expand to include representatives of local and state funders in order to promote uniformity of understanding and support for service models and relationships developed under the initiative

SECURITY MEASURES

- Goal: providing security through the least invasive and most unobtrusive methods
- Security has cultural and urban contexts; must consider implications of security and setting
- Recognize how urban settings impact and limit security measures (e.g., public transportation, limited and costly parking)
- Requires flexibility
- Exchanges can be more problematic for safety and security than supervised visits
- Requires flexibility to step up or relax level of supervision, terminate services

- √ Decision to not institute more intrusive changes, such as metal detectors and uniformed guards
- √ Develop less intrusive measures including
 - Two-way radios
 - Panic buttons
 - Facilitate victim and children's arrival and departure, as well as supervised exchanges
 - Staggered arrival and departure
 - Sign in and out
 - Different waiting areas



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

SECURITY MEASURES

- Challenge for centers to communicate with one another, within confines of confidentiality requirements, when they have terminated or rejected a case
- Consideration for families and communities’ historic experiences with the criminal legal system
- Visitation center programs are not looking to demonize the battering parent
- “Using the most noninvasive means of safety provisions within a visitation center while still maintaining the safety of the client family and visitation center staff creates an environment that is respectful of every member of the client family utilizing services”

- Security cameras
- Increase number of staff on-site during visits
- Agreement to ensure a priority response by police
- √ Emphasis on communication
- √ Ways in which people are welcomed and introduced — “conversational intake” — contributes to overall security
- √ Interpreters need training about domestic violence in order to recognize when a parent is attempting to engage in battering behaviors
- √ Consideration of group visitation
- √ Decision whether or not to terminate visitation services requires safety planning

SUSTAINABILITY

- Fees from parents cannot (and should not) be a basis of sustaining income for visitation centers
- “The most significant shift in the consideration of sustainability has been the identification of the need to look outside of traditional domestic violence funding streams to sustain the visitation centers”
- Long-range sustainability requires permanent and earmarked source of revenue for domestic violence- specific supervised visitation and exchange services

- √ Bring supervised visitation into the wider coordinate community response
- √ Reassure the domestic violence community that the sustainability plan of the centers identifies new funding sources
- √ Set stage for further discussion of funding
 - Use the Safety Audit report (*A Discussion of Accounting for Culture in Supervised Visitation Practices*) as a way to introduce the Demonstration Initiative and supervised visitation and exchange to agencies and funders that may not have been familiar with them
 - Presentation to Illinois Department of Human Services
- √ Provide centers with a needs statement and program description to present a unified approach to funders that reflects the philosophy and goals of the Demonstration Initiative
- √ Multiple funding sources: city, state, federal, and private foundations



SNAPSHOT THE CITY OF KENT, WASHINGTON



“ *In seeking to include the widest range of community residents, the Kent Demonstration Initiative established a language interpretation component in its work that could fit the circumstances of any language spoken by a family.* ”



The City of Kent, Washington

Demonstration Initiative Snapshot

THE COMMUNITY

In January 2001, following the 1998 murder of a mother and child who had been using its services per court order, a visitation center in King County was closed because of security concerns and lack of adequate funding. Through its participation in the Demonstration Initiative, the City of Kent was able to design and open a new center to serve families in the city and South King County. The Safe Havens Visitation Center opened in early 2005.

Kent is a city of approximately 84,000, located in King County, midway between Seattle and Tacoma. It is a fast-growing community whose population doubled between 1990 and 2000. This growth contributed to the county's location of expanded court facilities in Kent and construction of the Regional Justice Center. Thirty percent of the city's population reported a race other than white in the 2000, including African American (8.2%) and Asian (9.4%) among the highest numbers. Almost 22% of the city's census population speaks a language other than English at home. The community includes immigrants from Russia, Ukraine, Somalia, Ethiopia, India, and Mexico. The percentage of families living below the official poverty level is slightly less than the national average, but higher than Seattle and nearly double the rate in King County.

The Kent Supervised Visitation Program Demonstration Initiative grant was administered by the city's Division of Housing and Human Services. Tracee Parker was the local project director, as well as director of the newly established Safe Havens Visitation Center. The Demonstration Initiative involved key community partners among the courts and domestic violence advocacy organizations.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGENCY PARTNERS:

- *Chaya (providing specialized services to South Asian communities in Kent and King County)*
- *YWCA of South King County*
- *CARA (Communities Against Rape and Abuse, providing specialized services to communities of color and people with disabilities)*
- *King County Coalition Against Domestic Violence*
- *Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence*

COURT PARTNER: King County Superior Court

- *Unified Family Court*
- *Family Court Services*





AN ESSENTIAL DISCUSSION

How does a victim of battering who might benefit from supervised visitation find out about it, decide whether or not to use it, communicate that decision to the court, and locate a visitation program?

As part of the Demonstration Initiative, the Kent collaborating partners and the Supervised Visitation Program's national technical assistance partners (Praxis International and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges) conducted a Safety Audit, which got underway seven months after the center opened its doors.²⁴ It had become apparent that battered women were finding their way to the Safe Havens Visitation Center and other visitation providers in rather haphazard ways. The center and its community partners wanted to learn more about how victims of battering learn about supervised visitation as an option for themselves and their children, how they express their concerns to the court, and how they find visitation and exchange services that are organized to recognize and account for battering. They discovered:

- Victims of battering need stronger advocacy and more complete information about legal processes after they have separated from their partners.
 - Victims of battering are confused about who is an “advocate” and what the various practitioners with that title can and cannot do for them.
 - Domestic violence advocates, both community-based and system-based, do not have a systematic way of talking with battered women about options for visitation.
 - Restrictions on the Protection Order Advocate's role in the courtroom can impede a victim of battering in requesting or questioning supervised visitation and other relief or orders.

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

- Intervening systems – i.e., courts, advocacy, supervised visitation – are disconnected and fragmented in their response and understanding of battering.
 - Interveners are unprepared to talk with a victim of battering about how her children are used as part of battering, and how that affects her safety and well-being, and her children’s safety and well-being.
 - The courts do not share a clear, consistent understanding of supervised visitation in the context of battering, as distinct from supervised visitation in child abuse and neglect cases.
 - Across the courts, there is tension between the priorities of safety for victims of battering and their children, and parental rights to have access to their children.

- Victims of battering hear many messages about “autonomy and self-determination” and “empowerment,” but systems and resources are not adequately set up to promote those values and to structure their practices accordingly.

- Communication processes between the courts and supervised visitation providers have not been well-defined.

- Courtroom security does not fully account for the multiple ways in which a batterer might encounter and threaten or intimidate a victim. Victims may not feel safe to freely express their concerns regarding visitation in such a setting.

The demonstration site partners say that victims of battering in Kent and King County found out about supervised visitation in scattered, haphazard ways, if at all. They were not necessarily connected with the kind of long-term, post-separation advocacy that could help them make critical decisions whether and how supervised visitation or safe exchange would contribute to their and their children’s safety. The Kent inquiry reinforced the importance of linking supervised visitation to a larger practice of post-separation safety and advocacy.

SHIFTS IN THINKING AND PRACTICE

In designing a new center, Kent did not have to undo practices already in place. Nor was it a rushed process, squeezed into a few months. Over an eighteen-month planning period, Kent was able to make use of consultations with other Demonstration Initiative sites and technical assistance partners, multiple training opportunities with researchers and experienced practitioners, and site visits to other centers. “This level of preparation helped us to critically think through lots of difficult issues and set the tone for how we continue to work together at the center.”

Highlights of Kent’s work are presented in the following table, which should not be read as capturing the full breadth and depth of its work within the Demonstration Initiative and the Supervised Visitation Program, or every dimension of change. It focuses on seven areas of exploration and change that were the focus of the larger initiative: meeting the needs of adult and child victims, partnerships with domestic violence advocates, relationships with the courts, cultural accessibility, consulting committees, security measures, and sustainability.

Kent articulated an explicit role for the visitation center as providing services in the context of domestic violence. It defined the following mission and philosophy of service, which are visible in its brochures, welcome packet, and other information provided to those using the center.

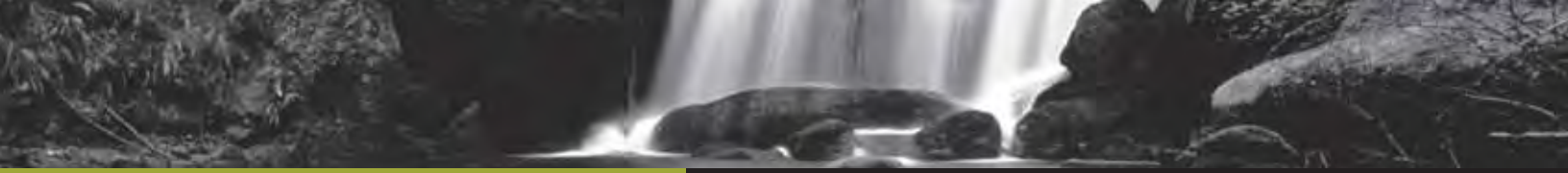
MISSION: To provide a safe and accessible, culturally sensitive supervised visitation and exchange program for families affected by intimate partner violence and abuse.

PHILOSOPHY: All services are designed with the objective of increasing safety for victims of domestic violence and decreasing opportunities for further abuse. We adhere to this objective regardless of which parent is designated as the visiting party.

Kent has not shied away from this purpose and has shaped its practices accordingly. In hiring staff and establishing a new program, it put a premium on knowledge and experience related to community response to domestic violence. It sought to strengthen visitation practices overall by encouraging standards and expectations that apply to all professional supervised visitation orders issued in King County, recognizing that the Safe Havens Center could not serve every family where domestic violence specific visitation would be warranted. As a result of this collaboration, an adult victim of battering will find it more likely that a center or individual practitioner will follow key practices that better account for the unique safety considerations in domestic violence cases, regardless of whether a specific referral is made to Safe Havens. The experience of the Demonstration Initiative also contributed to the development of countywide coordinate response guidelines for domestic violence and child maltreatment. The guidelines include considerations for the court in making decisions about supervised visitation in such cases, including factors to use in selecting supervised visitation providers that are knowledgeable about domestic violence and batterers as parents. All aspects of the Kent Safe Havens Visitation Center have been designed to account for domestic violence, from the organization of the physical space to a minimal approach to documentation, emphasis on frequent staff communication about every family using the center, and connections between adult victims and advocacy and other community services.

In seeking to include the widest range of community residents, the Kent Demonstration Initiative established a language interpretation component in its work that could fit the circumstances of any language spoken by a family.

As the Demonstration Initiative concluded, the Kent Safe Havens Visitation Center had been in operation for two years, following a thoughtful, measured period of design and discovery that shaped the center and its mission. Funding for the center was split between a continuing grant under the federal Supervised Visitation Program and support from Kent, King County, and the state. The center's long-range plan for sustainability includes establishing a three-tiered funding structure that splits costs equally between the city, county, and state. Families using the center come from across King County, as well as adjacent counties. At the close of the initiative a more secure funding mechanism had not been established, however, and the center remained in a position of having to bring its work to the attention of individual elected officials at each level of government.



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

NEEDS OF ADULT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THEIR CHILDREN

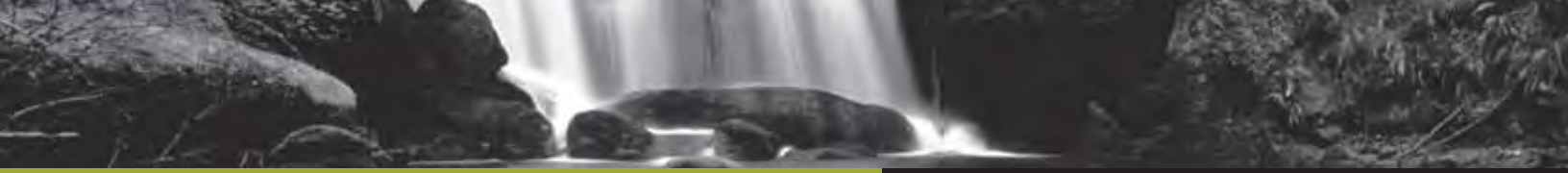
- Survivors do not always see supervised visitation as helpful to their safety
 - Confused about court orders
 - Arrived with little information about visitation or the center
 - Saw visitation as punitive and the center as an arm of the court
- Visitation practices can have a significant impact victims’ safety and well-being
 - For some adult victims, “no access” would be very dangerous
 - For others, a missed appointment means another court action
- Visitation must be factored in as a key aspect of post-separation safety planning
- Awareness of batterers’ tenacity and creativity is crucial
 - Ways of using children
 - “Every single thing said or done can become a tool of battering!”
- Establish a standard for all local visitation providers around services to domestic violence survivors and their children

- √ “We started from scratch. Everything is new!”
- √ Examine ways in which adult victims discover, learn about, and access supervised visitation
- √ Safety planning at the center
 - Safety planning specific to visitation center
 - Supervised visitation as aspect of all safety planning
- √ Hire staff with solid knowledge of domestic violence, which “created a solid philosophical foundation”
- √ “We are still struggling with how services should look for survivors who are noncustodial, visiting parents.”
- √ Invite community advocates to present education group addressing post-separation advocacy issues

PARTNERSHIPS WITH BATTERED WOMEN’S ADVOCACY PROGRAMS

- “We weren’t prepared for how hard it would be to build this relationship.”
- Barriers
 - Advocacy unaware of Safe Havens center and what it did
 - Mistrust or defensiveness that visitation was safe for battered women
 - Advocates skeptical that center would understand safety needs of survivors

- √ Visitation center staff with advocacy experience bring insight and understanding to making connections with advocates
- √ Reach out directly to front-line advocates
 - Bring along to trainings
 - Invite to tour center
- √ Pay more direct attention to post-separation advocacy
 - “Shop Talk” presentation on visitation as an aspect of safety planning



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

PARTNERSHIPS WITH BATTERED WOMEN'S ADVOCACY PROGRAMS

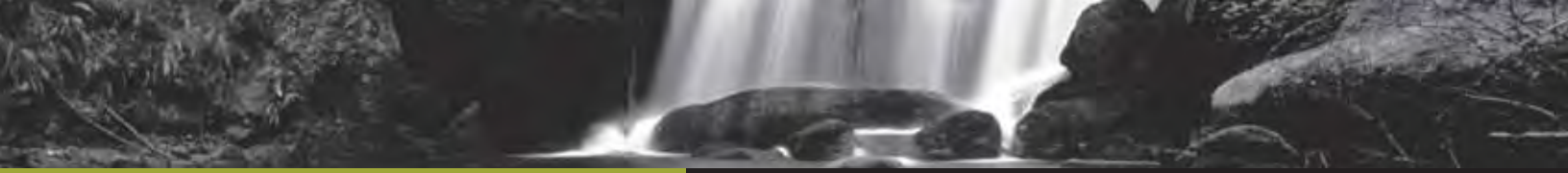
- Need to develop relationships with advocates who work directly with battered women
 - Expand connections beyond agency directors
 - Difficult when advocates are chronically overextended
- Need to inform advocates about realities of visitation programs: namely, who, where, and how services can be harmful to battered women

- Carry discussion to local and state levels
- √ Bring domestic violence advocates in to conduct in-service training for visitation center staff
- √ Include local domestic violence services in planning
- √ Create a local group of experts who can provide ongoing support and training on issues related to visitation and domestic violence

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE COURTS

- “The biggest single eye-opener was recognizing that there is no consistency in how the court determines whether a batterer should have professional supervised visitation.”
- Could not assume that courts recognized the distinction between the center’s focus on safety in the context of domestic violence and other sources of supervised visitation (e.g., private practitioners, family members)
 - Address courts’ assumption that Safe Havens was avenue for low-income families rather than emphasis on how it addressed safety
 - Recognize impact of frequent rotations of judges and commissioners
 - Educate court personnel (judges, commissioners, and social workers) as to how battering continues in visitation, even when supervised
 - Increase courts’ awareness that there are no standards, regulations, certification, or monitoring processes in Washington State required of professional visitation providers; anyone can do it

- √ Shared training and opportunities for dialogue are essential
- √ Regular meetings and contact between the center and court personnel are essential
- √ Develop a Safe Havens specific order
 - Clear message that it is domestic violence specific
 - Defines services as providing safety in and around center before, during and after visits
 - Statement that center will not provide parenting assessments or custody/visitation recommendations
- √ Develop county-wide visitation order that frames standards for professional visitation and exchange that better account for domestic violence, regardless of a specific Safe Havens referral
- √ Courts do not have any system for tracking visitation orders and most survivors do not want to return to court unless absolutely necessary
 - Figure out the center’s role in notifying the court when batterer stops coming, services terminated, or there’s been a serious safety violation



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE COURTS

- √ Develop relationships with family court case managers in order to better support and communicate to the court rejection or termination of cases because of safety

CULTURAL ACCESSIBILITY

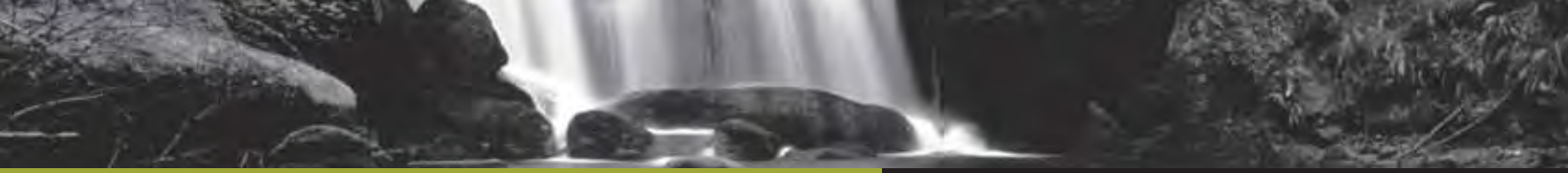
- “We knew it would be hard work, and it is! If anything, we’ve come to realize it’s even harder than we expected.”
- Common immigrant experience between center staff and families can add greatly to trust and rapport, regardless of whether they share a country of origin
- Including advocacy partners from more diverse communities in the initial grant application would have encouraged curiosity and participation before opening the center
- Recognize demands on culturally specific advocacy services and identify ways to include their voices on a regular basis
- Go to culturally specific advocacy services and attend events that might be of interest to them, rather than rely on connections being made via visitation sponsored meetings or events
- Acknowledge that our model of supervised visitation is not appropriate for everyone; where can we be flexible and where is consistency essential?

- √ Establish an interpreter program to include speakers in any language requested
 - Screening and personal recommendations
 - Clearly explain center’s expectations and role as interpreter only
 - Microphone and headset system in order to be less invasive
- √ Add bicultural, bilingual staff to make families more at ease
- √ Increase diversity of staff to increase diversity of people served
- √ Training by and for culturally specific agencies that have a domestic violence service component
- √ Train center staff on how to work with interpreters
- √ Set priorities for translating center materials, e.g., informational brochures, welcome packet, service agreement

CONSULTING COMMITTEES

- Start with members who have more than a basic knowledge of domestic violence issues or it is difficult to get to supervised visitation issues
- Define roles and expectations
- Increase diversity among committee members

- √ Choose members for specific skills, expertise, and potential to influence key partners
- √ Consulting committees need to reflect different needs at planning versus implementation stages
- √ Consulting committee members serve as links to larger community



SHIFTS IN THINKING

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE

CONSULTING COMMITTEES

- Committee members are essential in addressing the larger issues revealed at the center; they have a key role in leading social change efforts

SECURITY MEASURES

- Let go of the idea of having an off-duty police officer present and “determined that good screening and clear expectations would be more effective”
- Turning a case away as “too dangerous” is a stand a center needs to take
- Clear message that center addresses domestic violence related cases
- “We want to have in place policies that take into consideration the needs of individual families. This means an ability to remain flexible and adjust protocol as needed.”

- ✓ No reliance on a security officer on site
- ✓ Build police understanding of visitation center and its security needs
- ✓ Build relationships with center’s immediate neighbors
- ✓ Cannot establish security policies and procedures without an actual physical location
- ✓ “No surprises,” meaning that anything written in a case file should not come as a surprise to a batterer
- ✓ Design with security in mind: separate parking; cameras; overhead sound monitors in visitation area; 911 panic buttons; wireless alert light; one-way window into visitation area; key pad locking systems
- ✓ Allow two hours for initial meeting with each parent
- ✓ Training on batterer intervention and child development to help staff redirect in way that do not come off as a challenge or threat

SUSTAINABILITY

- “At this point we are still on very shaky ground.”
- Requires multiple sources and relationships, public and private
- Need to infuse the community with the notion of supervised visitation as part of the coordinated community response

- ✓ Emphasis on supervised visitation as an extension of services for victims of battering
- ✓ Invite legislators, policy-makers, and funders to the center for personal tours and public events
- ✓ Utilize education interns and AmeriCorps volunteers









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