

Memorandum



Date: July 18, 2006

Agenda Item No. 12(B)1

To: Honorable Chairman Joe A. Martinez
and Members, Board of County Commissioners

From: George W. Burgess
County Manager

Subject: Enhancement of Victims' Services – Executive Summary

In response to your request for the development of an improvement plan for the existing service delivery system for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, attached is the report completed by Assistant County Manager Mae D. Bryant in conjunction with staff from the Department of Human Services.

If you need additional information please contact Dr. Bryant at (305) 375-2713.

Attachment


Mae D. Bryant
Assistant County Manager

Miami-Dade County

Enhancement of Victims' Services **Executive Summary**

Introduction

Pursuant to Resolution #1372-04, sponsored by Chairman Joe A. Martinez, a July 2005 report jointly prepared by the Miami-Dade Police Department and the Department of Human Services (DHS) recommended a comprehensive study of the existing service delivery system for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault and that an appropriate improvement plan be developed. The study included reviews of national models and "best practice" approaches, and the convening of a community-wide training seminar on the development of a provider network.

The review of "best practices" in the provision of victim-centered services in the country concluded that the premier model is the San Diego, California Family Justice Center (FJC). The Family Justice Center is the culmination of a process that began with a proposal made in 1989 by a San Diego Deputy City Attorney for a one-stop domestic violence center where victims would receive all needed services under one roof. Over the next several years alliances were developed from which a multidisciplinary service center emerged where victims could get a restraining order, see a prosecutor, talk to a detective, and meet with an advocate from a children's hospital, in one location. This concept was introduced in response to the nationally recognized problem of fragmented, disjointed systems of services for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault with separate agencies offering related, but uncoordinated services in scattered locations. Oftentimes, victims needed to travel to several different places to get help, repeating their stories as many as 30 times to different people to receive all necessary services.

In 1998, the San Diego Police Department and the City Attorney considered expanding on the idea and created a planning team. Together, the group held community forums, conducted focus groups, and visited other sites. A formal proposal for the expansion received unanimous approval of the Mayor, City Council, and City Manager in 2002, and the current center, the San Diego Family Justice Center, opened its doors in October 2002.

In San Diego, "The structured environment of a Center provides the opportunity to move from sporadic interactions among well-meaning agencies to dynamic, powerful, effective relationships in a centralized facility." Currently, the Center houses the San Diego Police Department's entire domestic violence unit, the City Attorney's domestic violence unit, and staff from about 20 other community nonprofit domestic violence and sexual assault agencies and County agencies. The Center averages more than 600 clients, including 200 children, and 3,000 phone calls per month. In client satisfaction responses, the Center is described as a warm, comfortable place in a good location

where clients could go for respite and access to services and feel safe. Clients appreciate getting information on next steps, referrals for other services and help in communicating with others in the system; and frequently comment on the convenience of having needed services under one roof. Clients report feeling stronger, more independent, better able to care for themselves and less afraid as a result of the Center. This collaboration has also coincided with a steadily reduced rate of domestic violence homicides in San Diego.

Another "best practice" in coordinating victim services, the Victim Services Network (VSN), was found in Denver, Colorado. The mission of the Denver VSN is to work with the community to create a model network of services which offers outreach as well as innovative, specialized, seamless and integrated services to all victims of crime, helping to strengthen and restore the fabric of the community. This is accomplished through increased outreach efforts to previously unserved and underserved populations, institutionalized training for service providers and allied professionals who work with victims, and using applied technology to ensure improved services and information for victims of crime. The Denver VSN, through the VS2000 initiative, provides training and technical assistance to communities wanting to establish a similar network.

In the course of studying the issues in Miami-Dade County, a two-day training was sponsored in late May 2005 with an invitation extended to all entities involved in the response to domestic violence/sexual assault. The purpose of the training was to assess the County's existing service delivery system and assist victim service providers and allied professionals to begin a collaborative process towards the development of a comprehensive, coordinated, seamless service delivery system. Coordinated by the Miami-Dade Police Department and the Department of Human Services' Domestic Violence Oversight Board (DVOB) staff, the training was conducted by representatives of the Denver, Colorado VS2000 model. Forty-nine (49) attendees, representing eight (8) police departments, the State Attorney's Office, the Office of the Attorney General, Legal Aid, faith-based agencies, Florida International University, the Miami-Dade County Public Schools, community advocates, community-based providers, the Clerk of Courts, and staff of the Board of County Commissioners, participated in the training (see Attachment A for list of attendees).

The result of the study, the "Victims' Services Feasibility Study", was presented to the Board of County Commissioners in September 2005. Overall, the results indicated that very valuable victim services are available in the community through a number of private, not-for-profit, community-based providers and the public sector, through the County. While there is a wide array of services, they are not integrated in a fashion or manner to maximize efficiency and ease of accessibility for clients. The County recognizes the assets and contributions of the community-based organizations, and is desirous of spearheading and implementing a comprehensive system involving the full spectrum of services available in the community. Subsequently, the County Manager was directed to implement the recommendations (Resolution #1086-05). In turn, the County Manager directed DHS to prepare a plan for coordination of victim services.

The Department of Human Services joined by the Miami-Dade Police Department, the General Services Administration (GSA) Department and the State Attorney's Office, who has agreed to participate in the process as well as co-locate with staff, have been developing a proposal and implementation plan for the coordination of services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Although we recognize the great need for services for victims of other crimes as well, the scope of this initial effort will be limited to domestic violence and sexual assault. However, this does not preclude the eventual phasing in of services to victims of other crimes. The proposed plan includes two key components:

1. Establishment of the initial Miami-Dade Coordinated Victims Assistance Center (CVAC), and
2. Implementation of the Countywide Victims Services Network.

Although the two components are quite different in nature, they are interdependent. Also, In terms of implementation, the two components will overlap.

Key Component #1- Establishment of the Initial Miami-Dade Coordinated Victims Assistance Center (CVAC)

It is recommended that the County establish a demonstration Coordinated Victims Assistance Center (CVAC), inspired by aspects of the San Diego Family Justice Center. The demonstration CVAC will establish the structure and operational model for co-located domestic violence/sexual assault victim assessment, advocacy and referral services, and access to the processes of protection and investigation afforded by the law enforcement and justice system. Recognizing the size and dispersion of Miami-Dade County, at least four (4) such centers, located in different areas of the County to provide full accessibility to all County residents, will be necessary. The initial site will be located in the contiguous area with the highest reported incidence rates of domestic violence and sexual assault. The site will require approximately 15,000 square feet, with the flexibility of being designed to create a setting conducive to the CVAC process. It is imperative that the site be accessible to public transportation and easy to locate.

Given these requirements, the identification of an appropriate site has been a challenge. The General Services Administration (GSA) Department has been exploring possible options based on the background of the project, space needs for the anticipated staff assignments to the facility by the various partners, and operational requirements for offering a welcoming and reassuring atmosphere to deliver victim-centered services. GSA has also been provided with a listing of several properties that had been previously identified as potential sites. In addition to assessing possible sites, GSA has developed some preliminary assessments of financial impacts based on scenarios and cost/time analyses. County staff has also been in consultation with staff at the San Diego Family Justice Center and will continue to discuss facility design issues with them throughout the site development process.

The features selected from the San Diego model for the Miami-Dade pilot project will meet the immediate needs of domestic violence and sexual assault victims in our community and provide the County with the flexibility to expand services based on

emerging issues and needs identified by domestic violence victims and survivors. Although fashioned after the successful center that serves only the city of San Diego, the model proposed for the Miami-Dade CVAC has been modified to address the realities of this County's greater physical dimensions, resident dispersion, and the existing network of community providers. Although the San Diego model is a single center which provides comprehensive and ongoing service delivery to its clients, the Miami-Dade County model is designed to include several initial assessment and processing centers that will depend highly upon the community's network of social services providers to provide ongoing services in locations more accessible to the clients.

At the Miami-Dade CVAC, victims of domestic violence and sexual assault will be able to:

- receive crisis counseling and plan for their safety;
- speak to a counselor/advocate, receive an assessment of needs and referrals for services;
- speak to a police officer/detective, if desired;
- file an injunction for protection, if desired; and
- meet with a State Attorney's representative, if desired.

In order to most effectively implement the demonstration CVAC, several existing programs and services will be co-located at the one site. This initial CVAC will develop the framework for building a comprehensive, Countywide network which will provide coordinated short- and long-term services for victims and their children. The initial CVAC will involve the co-location of:

- The Department of Human Services' Domestic Violence Intake Unit which will provide victim "advocacy", assessments, service referrals, and assistance in obtaining an injunction for protection;
- The Department of Human Services' Family and Victims Services which will provide safety planning and crisis counseling services to victims and their children exposed to violence;
- The Department of Human Services' Victims Assistance Program which will provide support services such as transportation, food, clothing, emergency accommodations and financial assistance;
- The Florida Statewide Domestic Violence Hot Line, operated by the Department of Human Services, which offers emergency response in English, Spanish and Creole to victims of domestic violence;
- The Miami-Dade Police Department's Domestic Crimes Bureau which will be available to assist victims in filing police reports, initiating the investigation of a domestic violence case, and will coordinate efforts with other CVAC partners both on- and off-site;
- The State Attorney's Office which will conduct interviews, at the request of the victims to initiate the prosecution of victim cases; and
- The "Dial-A-Life" program which provides donated digital cellular telephones enabling recipients to call 911 for emergency assistance will continue to be coordinated by the Enterprise Technology Services Department (ETSD).

- The ETSD will also be instrumental in developing and establishing an information collection, transfer and management system to enhance the network of services, and a case management component which will link on-site services with community-based providers for the continuity of victims' services.

Additionally, since not all necessary victim services are currently available within the Miami-Dade County structure, the demonstration CVAC will also integrate services available through community-based victims' services providers. Selection of community-based providers to provide these functions will be determined through a Letter of Interest process. The County will seek community-based providers to offer on-site:

- crisis counseling/mental health services for victims and their children to deal with the immediate trauma of violence and threats;
- therapeutically-oriented mental health assessment services, for victims in need of safety and survival strategies; and
- legal services on issues of protection, financial support, child custody, legal status and immigration and other pertinent legal matters.

How will the CVAC operate?

The proposed 15,000 square foot facility will provide ample space for service provision and will be located in a site accessible to public transportation. On the outside, the CVAC will be visually welcoming and non-institutional. Inside, the CVAC will promote a non-threatening and comforting environment. Consistent with the San Diego center, the CVAC will be decorated in a warm and appealing manner with comfortable furnishings to provide a sense of calm and safety. The design will include: "quiet rooms" for victims and their families that will foster relaxation and clear thinking; private and comfortable interviewing rooms for victims and similarly appropriate areas for children; children's play areas; private phone call "booths"; and food preparation and dining areas.

Initially, the CVAC will be operational from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., daily. However, the hours of operation may be modified and/or extended to meet client service needs. Victims arriving at the CVAC will be received by staff, trained to be sensitive and understanding of the needs of a person in crisis, and knowledgeable on how to approach these individuals. Victims of domestic violence/sexual assault will be escorted for an assessment of their most critical and immediate need. At this juncture, available services will include crisis counseling with subsequent assessment for victims and their children, or a therapeutically-oriented assessment for non-emergency cases. All victims assessed will be appropriately referred for immediate medical services if warranted, and to community-based providers for follow-up and ongoing service delivery. Appointments for follow-up services in the community will be made utilizing a network of service providers that participate in a common management information system.

This system will be used not only to make an initial appointment with community-based providers, but will also permit follow-up on the outcome of the referrals, and additional case management services from an array of accessible services available through the

coordinated network of participants. The ability to connect victims' services providers on a common, web-based system will ensure that victims, taking the critical first step of seeking services, are provided with concrete service continuity. This system will close one of the principal gaps in the care of domestic violence/sexual assault victims by ensuring continuity of services. This is an essential feature of the plan as the core objective of this project is to improve and ease the victim's process of attaining services through the increased coordination of the provider network with the ultimate goal of strengthening and empowering victims.

Following the assessment, additional on-site services which will be provided, as appropriate, include:

- filing of an injunction for protection,
- legal information and counsel to address issues related to children and custody, separation, and immigration, etc.,
- placement in emergency shelter,
- financial assistance,
- provision of basic necessities, such as food and clothing, and
- transportation to shelters, police, and other social services.

Furthermore, the on-site availability of police and a State Attorney representative will allow, with the permission of the victim, the gathering of information vital to the prosecution of offenders.

Key Component #2 – Implementation of the Countywide Victims Services Network

The review of current best practices around the country in the coordination of victim services also identified the Denver (Colorado) Victim Services (VS2000) Network as an appropriate model for adaptation to the needs of Miami-Dade County. The Denver VS2000 project was funded to create a collaborative, community-driven system of victim services. The model focuses on outreach to underserved crime victims via the coordination of providers through technology, training, and case management.

The County proposes to adapt a version of the VS2000 Network in Miami-Dade County. County staff has already confirmed the direct support of the project's principals in providing guidance and technical assistance in the development of a victim services network that meets our needs. The Miami-Dade Victims Services Network is expected to:

- improve communication between providers;
- improve coordination of efforts between providers;
- increase awareness of available services and improve utilization of services through computer-based access to reliable information regarding providers;
- improve services to victims through on-line referral and appointment setting capability;
- permit follow-up of victim referrals;
- improve case management efforts by secure sharing of information among partners to determine who has provided services to a victim and what those services are (only with the client's explicit permission);

- improve the quality of services through training of providers; and
- prioritize self-care for workers who are vulnerable to vicarious trauma, a term used to describe the thoughts, feelings and behaviors that can result from the repeated exposure to the trauma of others, in order to nurture and sustain healthy organizations.

The model is considered appropriate for Miami-Dade County because, despite there being a number of victim services providers, these agencies each have a particular focus and are not necessarily working together. As such, there are service delivery system gaps as well as duplication of certain services. This model's emphasis on interagency collaboration, cross-training, and sharing of service information will dramatically improve interagency knowledge, and provide for more appropriate referrals, thereby increasing efficiencies at the agency and systems levels while meeting the needs of victims with greater precision. Development of the Network will involve:

- a step-wise process to determine the type and scale of available victims' services across the county;
- the installation and piloting of an Online Resource Directory, with the capacity of real-time information updating, that will connect services providers throughout the community;
- the development and implementation of a case management component which will permit the CVAC to make appointments with community providers, confirm referrals, determine whether appointments were kept, and facilitate case management for the clients; and
- the development of a computer-based, interactive victims' services information and training database in which network participants can view descriptions of upcoming training topics and also suggest topics for future consideration. This will greatly improve the quality of services among all providers through cross-training.

Significant progress can be realized concurrently on the two key components. While the CVAC is being developed, the implementation of the Countywide Victims Services Network can also be initiated. Initial steps will include:

- the survey of victims' service providers necessary for the development of the Online Resource Directory;
- a series of victim focus groups to obtain first-hand, in-depth information about the experiences and opinions of unserved and underserved victims of crime (coordinated by the CVAC staff and the service providers); and
- the cross-training of agencies and programs to improve resource referrals and interagency information and knowledge.

The development period will also provide opportunities to form supportive relationships with private sector partners that can leverage resources and provide civic involvement in the project to create a greater sense of community.

Required Staffing for the Key Components

The initial CVAC will involve the relocation of existing services including victims' advocacy, assessment and service referrals, crisis counseling for victims and their children, and support services such as transportation and emergency accommodations. However, the implementation will require 21 new positions (5 management; 16 direct service).

The five management positions will be responsible for the overall project and the day-to-day operations of the CVAC. Should additional CVACs be opened, these positions will assume a coordinating and oversight role for the network of CVACs. The positions are:

- Special Projects Administrator: Administrative head of the CVAC project, responsible for the overall operations of the CVAC sites and the Miami-Dade Victims Services Network. The Director will also be critical in developing and maintaining partnerships in the community.
- Administrative Secretary: Responsibilities will include providing supportive services to the Director and staff of the CVAC project. Will be responsible for preparing reports, organizing, planning and scheduling meetings.
- Contracts Officer: Responsibilities will include securing outside resources to maintain and enhance the center's operational capacity, assisting in the development of a 501c3 to support fundraising on behalf of the center needs and sustainability, and assisting in training.
- Training Specialist 2: Responsibilities will include quality assurance, development and implementation of a training program plan for CVAC staff and the community providers.
- Technology Support: Will coordinate and produce the Miami-Dade Victims Services Network and develop the management-information system for the CVAC project.

The sixteen (16) direct service positions are:

- Operations Manager (1): Responsible for site management and operations, including procurement and supervision of support staff.
- Clerk 4 (1): Responsible for personnel, procurement and clerical functions for the CVAC.
- Intake Specialist (4): These individuals are the first point of contact for clients entering the center. Responsibilities will include: obtaining basic information in order to appropriately handle the client's presenting concerns; escorting clients to appropriate service providers; providing information regarding general client related services; and answering telephone requests for information.
- Social Worker 2 (6): These individuals will provide the assessment, referral and case management functions for both adults and children.
- Security Guards
- Custodial Worker 2 (2): Responsible for the cleanliness and general upkeep of the center.
- Driver (2): Will provide transportation to victims to off-site service providers and messenger service.

The CVAC Advisory Board

It is recommended that the Miami-Dade County Domestic Violence Oversight Board (DVOB) expand its function in order to serve as the advisory board to the CVAC project. The DVOB was created by ordinance to serve in an advisory capacity to the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) with respect to all issues affecting or relating to domestic violence. Currently, each member of the BCC has one appointee and the County Manager appoints two members to the 15-member DVOB. Presently, a significant concern regarding the appointment of members by the BCC is that Commissioners are expected to select an individual according to a particular category of board composition, as specified by state statute. This, as such, limits the Commissioners' choice of appointees.

To address the expanded role of the DVOB, it is recommended that the board be increased from fifteen (15) to twenty-seven (27) voting members. The composition of the DVOB will be as follows:

- Each Commissioner will continue to have one appointment with no category limitation.
- The BCC, as a whole, will select and appoint eight (8) members, one for each of the following categories:
 1. Provider of services to domestic violence victims,
 2. Domestic violence victim advocate
 3. Member of the judiciary (a full-time, sitting judge/former or acting administrative judge of the domestic violence court),
 4. Concerned citizen (at large),
 5. Victim of domestic violence,
 6. Victim of sexual assault,
 7. Representative of impacted jurisdiction, and the
 8. Representative of the Public Health Trust, preferably from the Rape Treatment Center.
- There will be six (6) standing public sector members. The addition of these members will build and strengthen critical linkages to potent community institutions that can bring about widespread improvement in confronting the issues of domestic violence. The public sector entities will be represented by the:
 1. Superintendent of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools or designee,
 2. Chairperson of The Children's Trust or designee,
 3. State Attorney or designee,
 4. Chairperson of the Homeless Trust Board or designee,
 5. Miami-Dade County Manager or designee, and the
 6. Chairperson of the Dade County Association of Chiefs of Police or designee.

In order to implement these proposed changes to board composition, an amendment to the ordinance is required. The preliminary opinion of the County Attorney is that these changes are within the scope of the state statute which is the basis of the existing ordinance.