

Child Protection Investigations (CPI) Project



Spotlight on Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence

In an effort to address the needs of survivors involved in the child welfare system, the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence (FCADV) prioritizes the provision of intensive support to certified domestic violence centers, Community-Based Care (CBC) agencies, and local Department of Children and Families (DCF) offices. The Child Protection Investigations (CPI) Project seeks to bridge the gap between child welfare and domestic violence service providers to enhance family safety, create permanency for children, reduce removals of children from non-offending parents, and hold batterers accountable.

Domestic violence advocates work from an empowerment-based philosophy and, as a result, are highly skilled at identifying strengths. This expertise helps survivors of domestic violence and non-offending parents increase the protective factors that already exist in the home. Through the CPI project, domestic violence advocates are *co-located* within DCF offices to help Child Protective Investigators (CPIs) and case managers identify batterers' patterns of coercive control, gather information to address harmful batterer behaviors, and assess the impact of that behavior on the children.

Active engagement of interdisciplinary community leadership at every level is a critical component of the CPI Project. Therefore, each site has developed a Leadership Team that includes the local domestic violence center, heads of investigation and case management agencies, law enforcement, prosecutors, batterer intervention programs, and probation/parole. These local Leadership Teams ensure coordination of services and identify

opportunities to improve the community-wide response to survivors of domestic violence and their children, while increasing perpetrator accountability measures and strategies.

There are currently 40 certified domestic violence centers participating in FCADV's CPI Project. The CPI Project helps domestic violence centers and partnering CPI Units develop Memoranda of Understanding, referral documents, and releases necessary to share information. Helpful links to resources and other useful information for communities wishing to implement similar programs at home are available at <http://fcadv.org/projects-programs/child-welfare>.

Community impact

Early involvement of domestic violence advocates in cases where child abuse and domestic violence co-occur can reduce the risk to children by providing immediate resource and referral information and safety planning for non-offending parents and their children.

In fiscal year 2014-2015, more than 7,500 children whose families were involved in the child welfare system as a result of domestic violence remained safely in the home with the non-offending parent. As a result of these efforts, Florida experienced a potential savings of \$19,590,714 by keeping children with the non-offending parent and out of foster care.

Lessons learned

Domestic violence centers identified a number of

barriers to successful partnerships, including high turnover and a lack of understanding of one another's roles. To address these challenges, FCADV and the domestic violence centers worked to establish strong and trusting agency relationships, partnerships or task forces, education and training programs, and leadership commitment.

The FCADV believes that domestic violence advocates co-located in child welfare offices should be employed by domestic violence centers, and not

by the child welfare system. Co-located advocates need leadership and oversight from domestic violence centers in order to retain the skills and training required to work effectively with survivors and their children; survivors must feel confident that the information they disclose to domestic violence advocates will remain confidential; and domestic violence advocates directly connected to domestic violence centers can more readily refer victims to services.

Practice Tips

- **Role Clarification** - Policies around information sharing represented a common point of contention between child welfare organizations and domestic violence centers. FCADV recommends that both entities work together to understand each other's roles working with families and the laws under which each respective agency operates.
- **Groundwork for Collaboration** - Once domestic violence centers and child welfare workers have engaged in their initial meetings and conversations about their individual roles and responsibilities
- **Cross Training** - Domestic violence centers and child welfare agencies should provide and conduct cross trainings to help build a common understanding of one another's roles and responsibilities. Domestic violence advocates can provide training on domestic violence to help child welfare staff better understand the models, philosophies, and services provided by DV centers. They can also help child welfare professionals enhance their skills to interact effectively with both survivors and perpetrators in order to enhance child safety.
- **Data Collection** - States should develop a state level database containing partnership information such as MOUs and protocol documents, relevant community data, and the number of CPIs and case managers employed to determine funding needs for co-located domestic violence advocates.

© 2016 Resource Center on Domestic Violence: Child Protection and Custody, a project of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.



ABOUT THE RESOURCE CENTER

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges houses The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence: Child Protection and Custody. The Resource Center is devoted to helping domestic violence survivors and professionals such as judges, attorneys, social workers, and domestic violence advocates who work with survivors in the child protection and custody systems. In addition to providing training and technical assistance, the Resource Center also conducts research and evaluation projects focused on the intersection of domestic violence and child protection or child custody. Contact us by telephone at (800) 527-3223 or by email at fvdinfo@ncjfcj.org.