



Collaboration to Improve Civil Protection Order Systems



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF
JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES



Collaboration to Improve Civil Protection Order Systems

Introduction

Collaboration is a fundamental element of creating and sustaining lasting change in the civil protection order (CPO) system. Because of this, collaboration is a key guiding value¹ within the *Civil Protection Orders: A Guide for Improving Practice* (CPO Guide), a resource funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) and created by a committee of multidisciplinary experts dedicated to system improvement and change. The CPO Guide provides guiding values and practice strategies for a variety of stakeholders, including advocates, civil attorneys, courts and the judiciary, law enforcement, and prosecutors interested in improving their CPO system. As stated in the CPO Guide, “a victim needs and deserves to have confidence that everyone in the [CPO] system is working together to keep [them] safe. By working in concert with one another, professionals in the system provide victims a response that is unified, cohesive, reliable, and interactive. When professionals work in concert toward shared goals, the system is more accountable and communities are able to support and assist victims.”²

¹ The other guiding values include Safety, Autonomy, Accessibility, Competence, Reliability, Culture and Diversity, and Community Engagement.

² National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, [Civil Protection Orders: A Guide for Improving Practice](#), 17 (2010).

The CPO Guide establishes four universal strategies for collaboration:

Strategy 1. Identify and institutionalize opportunities for cross-system dialogue and collaboration to promote consistency and thoroughness in issuance, service, and enforcement;

- Collaboration enables service providers to understand the roles and mandates of one another, to establish and rely on coordinated protocols, and to work together for a more seamless and consistent protection order process. To that end, professionals throughout the system should create and institutionalize opportunities for collaboration among professionals working in state, tribal, federal, and military organizations and agencies.

Strategy 2. Treat collaboration as a process of co-creation and co-evolution;

- Some of the barriers to issuance, service, and enforcement will change over time. Professionals throughout the system need to create written policies and collaborative relationships that allow for regular review, continual evaluation, and ongoing development. Changes in partnership, roles, and responsibilities need to be communicated to staff immediately.

Strategy 3. Design and implement cross-training programs on effective protection order systems and violence prevention that bring together service providers; and

- A common understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence and dangers involved in the protection order system allows service providers to explore problem-solving opportunities together.

Strategy 4. Work beyond the civil protection order process to create a more just response to victims of domestic violence.

- Victims are often involved in a number of systems simultaneously. Collaborative efforts that include these other systems, such as child support, can have a positive impact on the victim's broad safety needs. Collaboration can improve a victim's well-being and can forward the goal of enhancing victim safety and autonomy.³

By highlighting four communities and their collaborative efforts, this publication looks at how courts and judicial officers can use their leadership to bring stakeholders and the larger community to the table to better improve their CPO systems. Application of the universal strategies of collaboration will be highlighted throughout this publication. Because of their importance to collaboration, a few of the universal strategies from the CPO Guide regarding culture and diversity and community engagement will also be highlighted.⁴

A Note on the Leadership Courts and Judges Can Play in Collaboration:

According to the CPO Guide, "[j]udges are a catalyst for collaboration. Judges play a key role in overseeing continuous improvement of service to the public. Judicial responsibility includes ensuring that the court system works in collaboration with other professions to see that orders are properly implemented and enforced. Judges can help ensure that court orders are understood fully and that offenders are held accountable for their actions by coordinating with agencies that serve and enter orders, by monitoring firearms relinquishment, and by providing other assistance." For more information on the ethics of judicial leadership and extra-judicial activities, See Hon. Karen Howze, Can I or Can't I? Extra Judicial Activity and Judicial Leadership, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (2019).

³ *Id.* at 18-19.

⁴ For more information on the CPO Guide's universal strategies, see the Common Ground section of the [CPO Guide](#).



Pulaski County Coordinated Community Response Team

Pulaski County, Virginia has a population just under 34,000⁵ and is situated at the bottom of the Appalachian Mountains in the southwest corner of Virginia. While this rural county lacks the wealth of resources some urban or more affluent areas have to address domestic violence in their communities, court and community partners have maximized two important resources—time and effort. Since 2006, under the leadership of the Honorable H. Lee Chitwood, the court has been bringing representatives from its communities together to build relationships among stakeholders and problem solve system challenges. Today, the Pulaski County Coordinated Community Response Team continues to grow and addresses emerging issues as they arise.

Judge Chitwood is the presiding judge over the Pulaski Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, where he hears matters involving custody, visitation, child support, delinquency, dependency, protective orders, all crimes between family or household members, crimes against

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, [QuickFacts: Pulaski County, Virginia](#) (2022).

children, and child in need of services/supervision petitions. Early on in his judicial career, Judge Chitwood became frustrated with the way his court was handling domestic violence cases. A majority of cases were either not prosecuted or dismissed. Offenders who were prosecuted often were put on probation and sent out the door to complete programs (including inappropriate ones such as anger management). There was no follow-up by the system while offenders were on probation to monitor whether they completed their required programs. The system in Pulaski County was failing to keep victims safe and hold offenders accountable—a failure, Judge Chitwood said, he was unwilling to accept. With the support of his court, Judge Chitwood sought opportunities locally and nationally to learn more about domestic violence and model practices for community response. Two major lessons he drew from these trainings were 1) the importance of getting stakeholders together at the table, and 2) that if a request is coming from a judge in a black robe, people are more inclined to accept an

invitation to meet. Judge Chitwood decided to hold a meeting.

Universal Strategies for Collaboration

Strategy 1: Identify and institutionalize opportunities for cross-system dialogue and collaboration to promote consistency and thoroughness in issuance, service, and enforcement.

Bringing People to the Table

In the beginning, Judge Chitwood invited initial stakeholders to attend an in-person meeting, asking them to be a part of the efforts to improve their community's response to domestic violence. The group included representatives from the abusive partner intervention program, advocates⁶ from the local Women's Resource Center, the public defenders'

⁶ According to the CPO Guide, advocates should collaborate with others in the community to improve the CPO system because "[a]dvocates are well-positioned to evaluate the efficacy of the protection order system and to press for needed improvements. Their intensive work with victims enables advocates to view and assess the system from a victim's perspective. In addition, they gain a comprehensive understanding of the protection order process through their work within various aspects of the system. Because this lens gives advocates a unique insight into gaps and barriers in the system, they can suggest improvements for the entire process."

office, prosecutors, juvenile and adult probation, law enforcement⁷ from the four agencies across the county, court staff, the department of social services, attorneys from legal aid,⁸ and the chief magistrate.

Two stakeholder groups that were not initially involved but that Judge Chitwood said have proven to be essential additions are forensic nurses and 9-1-1/dispatch. While forensic nurses are often thought of as vital stakeholders in sexual assault response, sexual assault is often a major component of intimate partner violence as well. Further, forensic nurses are critical in addressing non-fatal strangulation, a severe but commonly overlooked harm in domestic violence cases. In addition, according to Judge Chitwood, 9-1-1/dispatch are vital stakeholders for addressing domestic violence in rural communities, which can have few officers on duty responding to calls coming from a large geographic area, creating potential problems in crisis response. Dispatchers are often the first professionals to engage with those involved in a crisis. They are there from the beginning, working closely with law enforcement to address the situation. They hear from people who are upset, intoxicated, in crisis, and fear for their safety. It is critical for dispatchers to understand domestic violence and it is important to hear from them and benefit from their expertise on how the system can improve its response to those in crisis. Judge Chitwood said he also hopes to add representatives from the faith-based community to the team as the work continues to grow.

⁷ According to the CPO Guide, “[l]aw enforcement officers are a catalyst for collaboration” because they “are frontline responders whose experiences with crisis situations give them insight that can help other professionals in their efforts to improve the issuance and enforcement of protection orders. Department leadership can signal to responding officers and the public that protection order enforcement is important to public safety and is a priority through collaborative efforts and by creating departments that are open to change.”

⁸ According to the CPO Guide, civil attorneys play a key role in collaboration because “[c]ivil attorneys are in an ideal position to unite other stakeholders in the protection order process because they are involved in the process from application through enforcement. As civil attorneys become aware of problems within the system, they can be powerful advocates for change by engaging in collaborative efforts to improve the civil protection order process. In many jurisdictions, attorneys also link with advocates to ensure that victims have access to a full range of legal and advocacy services.”

Universal Strategies for Collaboration

Strategy 4: Work beyond the CPO process to create a more just response to victims of DV.

Some stakeholders may be more reluctant to engage in coordinated community response teams than others. The defense bar and the public defender's office often can be wary about what benefit community coordinated response teams can provide them and their clients, assuming it will just result in extra costs and hearings for their clients. For the team to truly address and improve the system

as a whole, it cannot be perceived as a vehicle to prosecute defendants. For judges and the courts to participate, all sides must have a voice at the table and individual cases cannot be discussed. Once the defense bar sees the improvements to the system as a whole, such as clarifying procedures and requirements for compliance with court orders, they often realize that their participation is in the best interests of their clients as well as the community.

Law enforcement also can be a hard group to get on board. Law enforcement has significant contact with victims and offenders of domestic violence and is often under resourced. Coordinated Community Response Teams can seem like just another "feel good" activity from the court on which they would rather not waste their time. Law enforcement and other community agencies are often asked to do more work and be involved with new initiatives that instantly go away once funds run out. To overcome this reluctance, Judge Chitwood believes in making conscious efforts to show participants that he is listening to their voices, he respects their time, values their input, and is serious about creating change. A few examples of how the Pulaski team embodies these efforts include setting quarterly meeting dates well in advance, providing notes from previous meetings, having an agenda and sticking to it. Having strong leadership and buy-in from these agencies is incredibly important to the implementation and sustainability of system change.

Universal Strategies for Collaboration

Strategy 3: Design and implement cross-training programs on effective protection order systems and violence prevention that bring together service providers.

Addressing Turn Over and New Stakeholders

Any stakeholder is welcome to join the team and members are encouraged to invite those that they think may be missing, or they can have Judge Chitwood reach out for them. While there can be turnover at service agencies, the team encourages new representatives to join the group. One of the main functions of these

meetings is to break down silos in the system and build relationships among stakeholders and service providers in the community. To address the gaps and barriers in the existing system, the team needs to be on the same page – have a shared understanding of domestic violence, the justice system’s processes and procedures, the roles of stakeholders, and the services available in the community. To promote sustainability, the team has created a *Domestic Violence Specialized Dockets: Rural Courts Resource Guide* for new members. In addition to laying out the expectations for each stakeholder, the manual provides a list of stakeholders and a description of their roles in the system, commonly used terminology and acronyms, copies of bench cards the judge uses for domestic violence specialty dockets (including cards on compliance review hearings, protection order check-lists, protection order dismissal requests, and on non-fatal strangulation), applicable laws, common court and intake forms, check-lists, surveys previously conducted, community outreach brochures, flow charts of local legal processes and procedures, and a list of continuing challenges and hurdles in responding to domestic violence.⁹

⁹ Pulaski County Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, *Domestic Violence Criminal and Compliance Dockets: A Rural Courts Resource Guide* (2023).

Universal Strategies for Community Engagement

Strategy 1: Collaborate with community members to enhance their ability to be proactive in safety and to raise their awareness of protection order relief.

Community Education

Another way the team handles the challenges with turnover in the system is by pairing meetings with educational opportunities. The team has been able to bring in local and national experts to provide training for team members, their colleagues, and the community at large to increase their understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence.

There have been thirteen trainings so far in the community on a wide range of topics related to domestic violence and the resources available in the community. To bring these trainings to the community, the team has partnered with local agencies and the local community college, utilized STOP grant funding from OVW, and enlisted the free or low-cost assistance of technical assistance providers, including the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judge's CPO Guide Project and other OVW funded national technical assistance projects. The subject matter of these training courses has been largely chosen through team discussions.

Community Successes

In addition to educating the community, the team has also made substantial improvements to the ability of the community to keep victims safe and hold offenders accountable. More cases are being brought to appropriate conclusions. Whether that means prosecution of an offender or their completion of a batterer's intervention program, every effort is made to ensure that no one simply falls through the cracks.

Community Engagement: *Connected, engaged, and knowledgeable communities enhance the effectiveness of the civil protection order system.*

To accomplish this, there were two major changes Judge Chitwood felt he could achieve through sheer “judicial stubbornness:” not sending domestic violence offenders to anger management and not issuing arrest warrants for victims that failed to appear at prosecution. Most changes, however, require buy in from system stakeholders and an understanding that “because that’s how we’ve always done it” is not an acceptable reason to continue ineffective practices. The team meetings have built new and strengthened existing relationships among stakeholders and are used to problem-solve challenges by bringing people together to talk through issues. This allows them to continuously make small improvements in practice instead of working in silos and talking at each other.

The team has made several improvements to the Pulaski County response to Domestic Violence. Specific to the improvement of the CPO system, the team has developed a video on domestic violence protection orders and requires respondents to watch the video after an order has been issued. The team has updated and developed local forms to assist in the timely service of protection orders and developed forms and addendums to go with orders. The team continues to work together to better the county’s response to domestic violence both in the CPO system and beyond and to meet new challenges as they arise.

Recommendations from Judge Chitwood

1. Call a meeting, get people together, and make a start! You aren't going to stop domestic violence overnight, so start by focusing on the low hanging fruit. Set obtainable goals and complete those tasks so the team has early successes, and team members feel like participation is worth it.
2. Remember to show that you respect participants' time and are listening to their voices. Set meetings and send out invitations well in advance. Include an agenda for each meeting and notes from the previous meeting. Stick to the agenda. Be practical in your approach, but don't be afraid to start.
3. Don't be discouraged by a lack of resources. This is more about time and effort. There is so much expertise in the community that you may not even know is available. Building a team helps to identify who those experts are and what resources exist.
4. For judicial officers interested in starting or participating in such a community team, it is imperative to include representatives from the defense bar and prosecution. This is not a team approach to convicting people; it is a chance for the system to focus on how to keep people safe and hold adjudicated offenders accountable. Such neutrality is a must for ethical judicial involvement.



Franklin County Common Pleas Court's Family Protection Center

In contrast to Pulaski County, Virginia, Franklin County, Ohio, has a population of about 1,322,000¹⁰ and includes the state capital, Columbus. But, like Pulaski County, Franklin County has built strong community collaboration to improve its civil protection order system, including the creation of the Family Protection Center in the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas Domestic Relations Division and Juvenile Branch.

Judge James Brown is very proud of the work his staff, stakeholders, and the community have put in to make the Family Protection Center for victims of domestic violence a reality. Before taking the bench, Judge Brown spent 32 years in private practice, dedicating much of that time to family law. Like many private practitioners, he had initially seen CPOs as something people legally abuse to get an advantage in their custody or divorce case. Once he took the bench and spent some time on the court's rotating duty week, it didn't take long for him to get the sense that his opinion on CPOs was wrong. Early on, he had a young woman in his courtroom requesting a

¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, [QuickFacts: Franklin County, Ohio](#) (2022).

protection order. She appeared disheveled and distraught, like she had had a difficult night. When he asked what had brought her to the court, she turned around to reveal missing hair and a number of substantial sutures on the back of her head. She had received treatment for an incident of domestic violence and the Municipal Court had suggested to her that she seek a CPO. This experience shook Judge Brown and made domestic violence seem infinitely more real. Soon after, he had another litigant appear in his courtroom. This time, the litigant, a new mother, was looking to terminate the protection order she had received weeks before. While a petitioner has the right to seek dismissal of their order, it is a practice of the court to swear them in and ask them a few questions about why they are seeking dismissal and to provide information about their options. When he asked why this new mother wanted to dismiss her order, he learned it was because she needed the child's father as there were few resources available to her and she couldn't provide for her child on her own. Judge Brown started thinking about what the court could do to connect litigants to the services readily available to those experiencing domestic violence in his community.

The Challenges

In Ohio, there are multiple types of protection orders available, depending on the relationship between the parties and if there is an open criminal matter. Each is handled by a different court. In Franklin County, this means going to different buildings within the judicial complex and can leave litigants confused as to where to go. For domestic violence CPOs, litigants seeking orders visited a cramped office with two desks and a waiting area consisting of folding chairs in the hallway and clip boards for litigants to use for their paperwork. Judge Brown wanted to improve the system by creating a single center where a petitioner could go to file for any of the available types of protection orders without having to travel throughout the complex and risk potentially running into the respondent or getting frustrated and giving up on the process.

Court can be an intimidating place for a recent victim of domestic violence. Judge Brown started asking, "what can we do to make the process easier?"

While Judge Brown explained that he did not have much in the way of court administrative skills at the time, he began asking around about creating a CPO help-center. He was told there had been many previous attempts to create a protection order center, none successful, but that the project was his if he wanted to try again. He worked with his staff attorney to bring together the list of stakeholders he was provided, including multiple representatives from each of the different courts hearing protection orders and representatives from local law enforcement agencies. After a few meetings, the stakeholders stopped responding. After 18 months, the project was shut down.

Universal Strategies for Collaboration

Strategy 2: Treat Collaboration as a process of co-creation and co-evolution.

While this setback was discouraging, the county commissioners realized how desperate the family court was for more space. As the family court looked to expand, Judge Brown's Administrative Judge knew he was passionate about creating some sort of protection order help center and set aside 2500 square feet within the court

for this purpose. With the help of his Administrative Judge and commissioners, Judge Brown was able to attend national domestic violence trainings, such as those offered through the [National Judicial Institute on Domestic Violence](#), make connections with other judges around the country, set up tours of protection order help centers in DeKalb County, Georgia, and Davidson County, Tennessee. He also visited help centers in St. Louis, Missouri, and Denver, Colorado, while attending other events. After learning more about how other courts around the country were addressing similar challenges, Judge Brown and his staff started putting pen to paper to design their own Family Protection Center for the Court of Common Pleas Domestic Relations Division.

Universal Strategies for Community Engagement

Strategy 1: Collaborate with community members to enhance their ability to be proactive in safety and to raise their awareness of protection order relief.

Meanwhile, Judge Brown began participating in other community projects to address domestic violence, such as the Firearms Technical Assistance Project and the Blueprint for Safety Project, both supported by OVW. Working with these projects helped to address some of the goals of the Family Protection Center, such as court wayfinding¹¹ implementation and

updated court forms and compliance procedures for firearms relinquishments in CPOs. He also found a new and integral community partner in the Center for Family Safety and Healing, which had been building a one-stop coordinated support center for families in need, with a large portion of their focus being on serving survivors of domestic violence. The family court and the Center for Family Safety and Healing embarked on a symbiotic relationship to assist each other realize their goals to help survivors. Through grant funding, the Center for Family Safety and Healing provides an advocate to work in the Family Protection Center inside the courthouse. Having an advocate provided from a non-court agency helps to maintain the court's neutrality, while providing litigants the assistance they need, Judge Brown explained.

Opening the Family Protection Center

While the COVID-19 pandemic changed some of the timelines and opening plans, the Family Protection Center opened in March of 2021 with secured space for litigants to wait and meet with center personnel that really cared about the litigants they serve. The Center continued to grow by adding a

¹¹ Wayfinding “encompasses all of the elements that assist people with orienting themselves in a physical location and navigating to their desired destination. Architecture, landmarks, lighting, landscape, and other visual features come together to provide cues in order for people to find their way in complex or unfamiliar environments. In a courthouse building, effective wayfinding techniques help court users by quickly informing them of their surroundings in a new and often intimidating or stressful space, and facilitating their ability to locate and access court services and functions.” National Center for State Courts, [Wayfinding and Signage Strategies for Language Access in the California Courts: Report and Recommendations](#), Judicial Council of California, 3 (2017).

staff attorney and a magistrate to hear the *ex parte* hearings. While the staff attorney does not provide direct representation or legal assistance, they can help with paperwork, answer questions about processes and witnesses, help liaisons determine which court is the proper venue for the type of order the litigant is seeking, and link litigants with other community resources that may be available to them. The advocate from the Center for Family Safety and Healing also provides an important link to services for petitioners. They can meet with litigants, safety plan, and immediately connect litigants to appropriate advocacy services offered through the Center for Family Safety and Healing or their community partners. This immediate link, Judge Brown explained, is so important because they have more confidence that petitioners who need services are not being lost in the distance between the courthouse door and the local domestic violence advocacy programs.

Even though the original goal was to create a single center among the three courts, the Family Protection Center was a huge accomplishment for the team, and they learned valuable lessons from the experience. After starting with a grand idea and having it lost to politics, bureaucracy, and competing interests, Judge Brown now believes it would have been helpful to have had a more narrow original focus and suggests starting with a clear and concise focus and mission statement. It is important that everyone know what the target of the collaboration is and to address conflicting ideas of what should be accomplished. He also suggests a lot of patience and perseverance.

Only the Beginning

The Franklin County Court of Common Pleas Domestic Relations Division hears about 2600 protection orders a year, but Judge Brown knows they are only scratching the surface of the community's needs. The team is already working to expand the center's footprint and finding new ways to make the court process more seamless and smoother for litigants – so they don't lose people to the process. That is a big part of what drives the team – not losing people who need help, who are seeking assistance from their community, not getting the help they need because the system is too

complicated, too hard to follow, and that goes for respondents, too. The respondents are important players that the court cannot ignore. Whether or not a respondent is ultimately adjudicated as having committed abuse, getting them information and services helps the CPO process. It leads to better information for the court on which to base its determinations, better compliance with any orders issued, and builds better trust in the system. It also helps the petitioner by limiting the need for continuances that arise from a respondent walking into their hearing unprepared and unaware about the court process. The court often loses petitioners when continuances are granted and they need to come back to court, to take more time off work, to find additional childcare, and other similar challenges. Getting the respondent what they need ahead of time cuts down on those challenges caused by continuances.

Universal Strategies for Collaboration

Strategy 4: Work beyond the CPO process to create a more just response to victims of DV.

With the ongoing support of the court and commissioners, Judge Brown's team envisions many future projects to continue improving the system. The beginning of 2024 will add new offices for the Family Protection Center and a second secured waiting room steps away from the courtroom

where full hearings are conducted. Additionally, there will be someone able to accompany the petitioner from the waiting room to the courtroom – making litigants more comfortable and cutting down on security risks. HOPE Cards, or plastic cards with the important information law enforcement needs to look up a protection order when the protected party cannot carry the full order on their person, will be coming to Franklin County in 2024, something Judge Brown learned about from Judge H. Lee Chitwood in Pulaski County, Virginia.

The Family Protection Center team is looking to update its website to potentially include an e-filing option and to provide more information, for both petitioners and respondents, on the court process, how to present a case, and how to find an attorney. Judge Brown also has been inspired by the videos other courts have put together and made available to the public

that walk through the protection order system from the door of the courthouse to the courtroom itself. A better understanding of the court process creates less intimidation and fear of the process and leads to better outcomes. Judge Brown is looking to bring a supervised visitation and exchange center to Franklin County as well. And finally, for phase two of the Family Protection Center, they are looking to do more outreach. It is one thing to have the Family Protection Center and all of these available resources, it is another for people to know they exist and how to access them.

Recommendations from Judge Brown:

- 1.** Look for opportunities to learn from others. Judge Brown has been a fellow on the Judicial Engagement Network¹, funded by OVW, and hopes to work with OVW's Mentor/Mentee Program. He has received a lot of support from his fellow judges he has met around the country, including Judge H. Lee Chitwood. Despite serving in geographically and demographically different communities, Judge Brown has found having other judges, like Judge Chitwood, with similar passions in addressing these issues incredibly helpful.
 - 2.** For building a protection order help center, space is a key component to start with. If you don't have some place to go, it isn't going anywhere.
 - 3.** Take time at the beginning to focus on what your goal is. Create a mission statement and provide it to stakeholders. When you ask for assistance, you want to be clear about what you are asking of them and what you are looking to accomplish.
 - 4.** Have patience and persistence. The work is constantly changing and not everything you do is going to be successful, but having a great team that can understand that is important. This isn't a turf war. Make sure you are listening to suggestions from each other and working together to try new things out.
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North Carolina's eCourts Civil Domestic Violence System

The courthouses in North Carolina, like many states, are at least partially housed in historic old buildings. Many of these buildings lack modern conveniences and no longer meet the needs of the court. To address this, larger courthouse complexes have been built around older buildings. As a result, when a survivor seeks a protection order, they may be rerouted to multiple buildings to fill out, file a petition, and have an *ex parte* hearing with the judge. Many courts look to mitigate the dangers related to petitioners encountering respondents within the courthouse, but walking between courthouse buildings can elevate that danger for the petitioner, any support persons accompanying them, court personnel, and anyone else on the courthouse complex. Back in 2013, Alamance County, North Carolina, had the idea that if resources were specifically targeted to the needs of survivors seeking protection orders, those survivors would be safer and better served.

Alamance County wanted to know how they could utilize technology to go remote with their CPO process, so they contacted the North Carolina

Administrative Office of the Courts (NCAOC) to partner on this endeavor. Stephanie Satkowiak was brought into the discussion because she served as the Domestic Violence Specialist for the NCAOC. Initially, there was a small amount of dedicated funds that NCAOC put toward the project, but continued expansion of the remote filing system required additional funding. Ms. Satkowiak was able to secure more funding from OVW pursuant to a grant designed to improve law enforcement response to and enforcement of domestic violence protection orders. These funds were used to expand on the original idea, creating North Carolina's eCourts Civil Domestic Violence Project (ECCDV). To maximize every dollar received, the project focused resources on counties that accounted for the most CPO filings, that had a high volume of calls for service to domestic violence agencies, that had high numbers of charges filed for assault on a female and strangulation, and counties with strong community collaborations already in place. Counties were also identified for their unique needs and characteristics. For example, Cumberland County was selected because it is home to Fort Liberty, the world's largest military installation. Through intensive work of the community collaborative in Cumberland County and the relationship between the chief district court judge and Fort Liberty's Garrison Commander, an ECCDV site was placed at Army Community Services. This allows military-connected survivors to apply for CPOs without leaving the installation, a huge win for the project, and the first time such a relationship has been established between a military installation and a civilian court to address civil matters.

Addressing the Barriers

According to Ms. Satkowiak, one of the challenges in addressing domestic violence in the South is the desire to sweep family issues under the rug, or at least a reluctance to put those issues front and center for community consumption. Because of the difficulty getting survivors through the door, Ms. Satkowiak explained, having holistic services available is of paramount importance. And having the human component to connect to is critical. The ECCDV system allows a survivor to file for a protection order from a family justice center or other domestic violence service agency. Advocates can safety plan and triage a survivor's needs – do they need a protection order,

or do they have other priorities? What unintended consequences might exist from filing for an order? If the survivor decides to pursue a protection order, advocates can help them get set up and they can go through a self-guided interview that auto-populates the court paperwork without leaving the safety of the service agency. The paperwork is then submitted electronically to the court. The survivor/petitioner swears to the court clerk the truth of the information in the petition utilizing remote videoconferencing technology, and if there are any errors in the petition, the clerk returns the paperwork to the advocate to make necessary corrections. Then the petition is electronically submitted to the judge who receives an alert that they have a petition ready for review. The judge conducts the *ex parte* hearing using remote technology without the need for the petitioner to leave the advocacy agency, providing an extra measure of safety for everyone involved. The judge prepares the order electronically and sends it back to the clerk. The notice of hearing, proof of service, summons and proposed domestic violence protective order (DVPO) are all auto populated and a copy is sent electronically to the sheriff's office. The ECCDV system integrates with law enforcement's systems so sheriff's deputies and law enforcement officers have real time access in the field to orders of protection. Once a deputy has been assigned, they can pick up a copy of the documents to be served on the defendant at the office or, they can print the documents off in their vehicle. Once a defendant has been served, the deputy marks it as such in the system and notification of service is automatically sent to the petitioner. This means survivors do not need to repeatedly call the sheriff's office or the clerk's office to see if the order has been served. The petitioner can choose whether they receive notification by email, text, or phone call or if they would like someone else, such as a friend or family member, notified. Everyone – court, law enforcement, advocates, and petitioners – has access in real time because the system is web-based, moving as fast as the internet allows.

Research Collaboration and Practice-Based Evidence

Early on in the project, Ms. Satkowiak knew that it was important to evaluate the work they were doing in order to measure successes, identify gaps, and, if successful, help sustain the work by identifying concrete

Universal Strategies for Collaboration

Strategy 2: Treat Collaboration as a process of co-creation and co-evolution.

benefits of the project to share with others. She previously worked with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Injury Prevention Research Center and Principal Investigator Dr. Beth Moracco around best practices for protection order implementation, specifically

using courtroom observations to look at predictors for the granting or denial of final orders. When the NCAOC received their grant from OVW, Ms. Satkowiak approached Dr. Moracco to see if her team was interested in evaluating e-filing outcomes. Once COVID-19 became a factor, the UNC researcher team looked at whether e-filing could mitigate the dangers of COVID to keep access to the courts open. Dr. Moracco and her team received additional funding for the evaluation research from OVW and named the project eProtect.

The eProtect study relied on an active advisory board to help guide the evaluation. The advisory board consisted of survivors of intimate partner violence, judges, representatives from sheriff's offices, clerks of court, and court advocates. They helped with the creation of interview tools and provided useful feedback on tools and the interpretation of the data. They also helped with recruitment of stakeholders and plaintiffs to participate in interviews and focus groups. According to Dr. Moracco, there is a huge net benefit to having multi-sector collaborations. From a research perspective,

Universal Strategies for Community Engagement

Strategy 2: Explore models of sustainability for promising community collaboration programs and investigate opportunities for holistic, non-crisis-driven involvement.

they comes to the project with their own capacities and strengths, but the researchers did not have the on-the-ground experience of working in the system day in and day out. The advisory group helped the research team prioritize what questions to ask because they understood the process, the barriers, and the participants. There is a lot of talk

about evidence-based practice, but Dr. Moracco also emphasized the need for practice-based evidence. These types of collaborations are essential to such work.

Universal Strategies for Community Engagement

Strategy 4: Create opportunities for open dialogue with communities that facilitate both an understanding of domestic violence and civil protection orders and an opportunity for feedback.

While multi-sector collaboration is incredibly helpful, Dr. Moracco also recognizes that it comes with its own set of challenges. Sometimes it takes longer logistically. There are more people to manage, and everyone has busy schedules. More voices also come with more opposing views and conflicting perspectives. Funding is also a challenge. Ideally, the project would compensate people for their time

and funding can make it hard to bring on more partners. For this project, they were able to compensate people for their mileage and costs to participate, but they would have preferred to offer honoraria. It can be hard to structurally bring this all together because sectors have traditionally been so siloed.

Because this project involved survivors of intimate partner violence, another challenge was ensuring extra safety mechanisms to prevent further endangering survivors. According to Dr. Moracco, safety must come first. Examples of safety mechanisms included setting up two code phrases for survivors, one to alert the interviewer that they needed to get off the call and the other if they needed the interview to contact help because the survivor was in danger. Interviewers used innocuous names for the study and study materials. They never left messages on voicemail and any text messages were generic. They also provided referrals to local services to everyone they interviewed, whether they disclosed abuse or not. And if they were partnering with a service organization or a member of the justice system to recruit participants, they made it very clear that participation would have no bearing on their ability to access services or the outcome of their cases. Anything less could be seen as coercion.

While the evaluation study has not, at the time of this writing, been published and is still undergoing peer review, preliminary findings showed that counties with e-filing had lower rates of involuntary dismissal, meaning cases where the petitioner did not appear for the return hearing. Further, this decrease was significant and sustained over time. Also, the time between the petition being filed and it being served as well as the time between the petition being filed and the final disposition were shorter in e-filing counties.

The sustained reductions in time between issuance of an *ex parte* order and the time of service lead to a sustained reduction in personnel hours for the sheriff's office. The service success rate also went up. One county was at about a 4% service rate, and it seemed as if respondents saw evading service as a fun game to play. With the changes to the system allowing for real-time access to information and a place to load notes about service attempts into the e-filing system, officers were able to increase that service rate to 40% and then 90%. Neighboring counties had access to the same information in the system and entered notes about their service attempts as well, increasing the real time communication between agencies. In a surprise to researchers, there was no increase in rates of filing for counties that had e-filing compared to those that did not. There also was no significant change in the rates of orders granted after final hearings and those that were denied, but such rates are more likely dependent on the facts of the case and what happens in the courtroom. The greatest predictor of whether or not a final order would be granted, they found, was whether the survivor was represented by legal counsel.

While everything happening electronically made for a quicker process, they also hypothesize that the supportive piece, what happens during that advocacy, is important. Getting support up front at the time of filing, having a positive experience, and being immediately connected to resources contributed to fewer voluntary dismissals.

Universal Strategies for Collaboration

Strategy 4: Work beyond the CPO process to create a more just response to victims of DV.

Taking it to the Military

Fort Liberty is a city within a city and spreads across several counties, but it is primarily located in Fayetteville, Cumberland County, North Carolina. Historically, the military was resistant to engaging in civil matters, particularly in civilian courts. But military-connected

survivors and their families should have ready access to civilian services and the civil court. Ms. Satkowiak decided she was going to develop a civilian ECCDV filing site located within Army Community Services, where family advocates provide wrap-around services to military families in crisis. By leveraging existing services, introduction of the ECCDV system would ensure that military-connected survivors had their best chance at getting what they needed to keep them and their families safe.

Cumberland County has a strong domestic violence task force. The former chief district court judge, now retired, was a member and, because of the importance of Fort Liberty, so was the installation's garrison commander. The judge was a critical ally for Ms. Satkowiak in getting the installation onboard. The judge and the garrison commander spoke the same language and, after some time together, the two came to Ms. Satkowiak ready to work with her to make the filing site a reality.

It took several months to get the Memorandum of Agreement approved through the many levels of government it takes to solidify a partnership with either the courts or the military. But the ECCDV project team made sure that the installation was fully supported. Introduction of the ECCDV system on Fort Liberty was complicated because it fully supplanted applications for military protective orders, which are not enforceable off-base by civilian law enforcement. Further, civilian protection orders allow judges to mandate removal of personal firearms.¹² Originally, Army Community Services said

¹² It is important to note that survivors eligible for a Military Protective Order (MPO) should not be discouraged from seeking both an MPO and a Civil Protection Order (CPO) for a variety of reasons. For more information on MPOs, how they differ from CPOs, how CPOs can affect a service member's ability to possess personal firearms,

they were only going to provide services to active duty or retired service members and their dependents. Once COVID-19 made travel unsafe, they opened the filing site up and offered assistance to anyone in need. Two more installations started to show interest in ECCDV before other factors pushed the NCAOC toward other projects.

Challenges to Collaboration

The ECCDV filing sites provide a pathway for people in crisis for help, support, and empowerment. According to Ms. Satkowiak, keeping pathways open and improving upon them can drive clients to community services that are designed to help them. But first, you have to establish communication with those agencies and ensure that they are robust enough to handle an influx of clients. Getting survivors to community-based resources isn't helpful if those resources don't have the capacity to assist them. They must be a part of the collaboration from the start.

According to Ms. Satkowiak, you also need to identify your champion in a county or community. Who is going to do this with us? That partner could be a judge, a clerk, or a sheriff, but it is important to have someone in the community that can drive the local efforts to bring stakeholders together. And for sustainability, you also need to make sure that you have someone to follow in their place should that person leave or retire.

Every county or community has its own culture, Ms. Satkowiak explained, especially in North Carolina. The communities on the coast are nothing like the ones in the mountains. Each is a world onto itself with different ideas and expectations. It is essential that you listen to and learn from those in the community you are serving. What works in one place won't necessarily work in another. Ms. Satkowiak has learned to pivot in order to meet those cultural needs. Add in her work with the military and state and federal Native American Tribes, and there are always new challenges. But she likes a challenge. And one way she has been able to address these challenges is by being present in the community and saying, "I'm

and how the two orders can be used together to keep military-connected survivors safe on an installation and off, see the Issues in Focus: Military Protective Orders section of the NCJFCJ's *Civil Protection Orders: A Guide to Improving Practice*.

accountable. If something is not right, it is on me.” This approach often results in a willingness for others to roll up their sleeves and be all in. In building collaborations, you start by asking others to make a huge leap of faith to join you in system change. Once the evidence of success becomes apparent, it is a lot easier to convince others to collaborate. They see the good the work can do.

Recommendations from Ms. Satkowiak:

- 1.** Find your community champion. That local support gets the collaboration off the ground and keeps it sustainable. They will help you bring other, more reluctant stakeholders on as well.
- 2.** Listen. Every community is different and the work should meet the needs of the community. Be comfortable pivoting to meet those needs.
- 3.** Understand that not everything works. And that is ok.
- 4.** Don't ask people to do something you aren't willing to do yourself – be willing to stick your neck out and be accountable for the work. Prove you are in it as much as they are. Help secure funding and set the work up for sustainability. Make sure you are working with and listening to community stakeholders so you can ensure you avoid overburdening your community partners.

Recommendations from Dr. Moracco for researchers:

- 1.** Budget sufficient time. It takes time to establish trust and to figure out the roles of the different people in the collaboration. Researchers have to pay their dues – they can't just walk into a population and instantly have that trust and effective communication needed to collaborate. It can take a long time.
- 2.** Really listen. Don't go into the collaboration with preconceived notions of what the research questions are and recognize the strengths of the group members.
- 3.** Be upfront about how data will be used, who has access to the data, who will participate in its dissemination. Make sure all of these details are clear and there is no exploitation.
- 4.** When working with survivors of intimate and/or gender-based violence, safety must come first. Evaluating the effectiveness of a program should never put survivors in further danger.



Anchorage District Court Enhanced Interpretive Services and Information in Civil Protection Orders

Judge Kari McCrea is a district court judge in the third judicial district in Anchorage, Alaska. In 2019, Judge McCrea was accepted into the Judicial Engagement Network (JEN) Fellowship program. Judge McCrea's project focused on increasing access to CPOs by enhancing interpretation services and improving the information available to the public. The project accomplishments included:

- Establishing stakeholder groups¹³ to evaluate the efficacy of court practices, for domestic violence victims;
- Working with stakeholders to enhance culturally responsive practices and establish benchmarks for meaningful access for all communities in Alaska;
- Establishing a network of community stakeholders interested in partnering with the court system in its efforts to increase the availability of Alaskan Native language interpreters;

¹³ According to the CPO Guide: "Collaborative efforts are also more likely to generate improvements to the civil protection order process through comprehensive system change".

- Establishing opportunities for judicial education and outreach to enhance awareness of the needs of litigants from diverse communities; and
- Simplification of CPO petitions and instructions.

The Community Need

The need for services and support for domestic violence survivors in Alaska is acute: research shows that over 50% of women in Alaska have experienced intimate partner, sexual violence, or both in their lifetime.¹⁴ Rates for Alaska Native women are estimated to be up to 10 times higher.¹⁵ While living in a rural community, Judge McCrea saw the impact of domestic violence and observed that victims, who were often Alaska Native, refrained from accessing court services or resources even after engaging law enforcement. After becoming a judge, Judge McCrea became interested in how the court, as a service provider, can improve access to civil justice for marginalized communities. The JEN fellowship provided Judge McCrea with the professional opportunity to understand the civil access needs of vulnerable populations.

Bringing the Community Together¹⁶

The fellowship program provided a unique opportunity to sit down and pull apart the pieces of the system to make improvements and access information, guidance, and support to implement needed changes. This support continues to be of benefit. Judge McCrea began by determining the stakeholders – within and outside the court system (Anchorage and rural

Universal Strategies for Culture and Diversity

Strategy 4: Understand that valuing culture and diversity requires an eagerness to learn and continual assessment.

¹⁴ [Alaska Victimization Survey: Comprehensive Data on Violence Against Alaska Women](#), University of Alaska Anchorage (last visited Dec. 14, 2023).

¹⁵ [Domestic Violence Awareness Month – Alaska stats](#), University of Alaska Anchorage (Oct. 24, 2022).

¹⁶ Culture and Diversity: An effective civil protection order system reflects the diversity of the community and responds to the specific needs, strengths, and circumstances of the litigants.

areas in Alaska) and soliciting feedback. The conversations included stakeholders in the court system and the broader communities, including non-profit service providers, native corporations, language assistance programs, and health care providers. Internal stakeholders included judicial officers in various communities, court administrators, domestic violence program participants, and law enforcement. The information obtained from the stakeholder groups greatly enhanced the court's understanding of civil access needs and barriers to access experienced in the various communities. Engaging with stakeholders who provide direct services to the targeted populations is essential to improving access.¹⁷ As the project progresses, Judge McCrea wants to expand the voices to include more connections with first responders, direct service providers, and litigants (people with lived experience).¹⁸

Creating a safe space where stakeholders can offer honest feedback is also critical. Judge McCrea wanted to ensure people felt comfortable

Universal Strategies for Collaboration

Strategy 1: Identify and institutionalize opportunities for cross-system and collaboration to promote consistency and thoroughness in issuance, service, and enforcement.

Strategy 4: Work beyond the CPO process to create a more just response to victims of DV.

speaking about the court systems' perceived shortcomings in the context of sensitive topics such as domestic violence and sexual assault, so she used a variety of methods to obtain feedback. She traveled to rural locations and prioritized holding in-person conversations, especially one-on-one opportunities. When possible, meetings were held outside of the

¹⁷ One of the guiding values in the CPO Guide is ensuring that professionals working in a CPO system understand the cultural context and respond to specific needs, strengths and circumstances of each litigant.

¹⁸ The CPO Guide emphasizes the need to create opportunities for open dialogue with communities to promote understanding and receive feedback.

Universal Strategies for Community Engagement

Strategy 1: Collaborate with community members to enhance their ability to be proactive in safety and to raise their awareness of protection order relief.

courthouse, in settings where the stakeholders felt most comfortable. She allotted sufficient time to address the issues respectfully, avoiding compressed time frames during the work day. When geographic issues posed a barrier to holding in-person conversations, virtual and telephonic platforms were used to receive input.

The Challenges and the Successes

It is a challenge to find interpreters for Alaskan native languages that are willing to work with the court system on an on-call basis. While the Language Line is commonly used by courts to immediately obtain an interpreter, they do not employ Alaska Native language interpreters. Often, interpretation is needed quickly for civil litigants, and delays can pose immediate safety concerns for victims seeking an order for protection.

Universal Strategies for Culture and Diversity

Strategy 3: Develop and maintain relationships with diverse community groups.

Judge McCrea worked with stakeholders, including court staff, to develop a certification program for interpreters with a curriculum and a supervision component. This program is under development, and is currently available to court employees who are fluent in an Alaska Native language and

express an interest in interpretation. The court continues to build partnerships within communities to help recruit and train interpreters for Native Alaskan languages. The court will collaborate with community representatives to review the curriculum content and ensure consistency among court practices and interpreter training.

Removing language and cultural barriers to bridge the communication gap between the court system and vulnerable victims remains a significant

challenge.¹⁹ During the pandemic the court focused on maintaining court access through alternative platforms. As the new practices become normalized and courts return to in person proceedings, Judge McCrea hopes to revisit the effort to recruit and train Alaska Native language interpreters. Judge McCrea will continue to promote the message that civil access to justice demands that the court provide to litigants competent, accessible interpreters for all languages, including those indigenous to Alaska.

Although the Alaskan CPO system has long allowed for telephonic or virtual hearings, the paperwork involved in applying for a CPO was lengthy and daunting. Judge McCrea improved the petition for a CPO by simplifying the language and reducing the petition from 12 pages to 6 pages, enhancing a plain language approach to the court system. The next goal around increasing public information is to develop videos and content for the court website detailing the process for petitioning the court for a CPO.

The project advanced the existing approaches to culturally appropriate trauma-informed practices and procedural justice. Judge McCrea established a process for promoting awareness and education among judicial officers while building community connections. A set of judges spent time in communities with new Americans to explain the role and the services of the various types of courts (civil, probate, juvenile, domestic relations, and criminal). The judges used a prepared script and arranged their presentations for simultaneous interpretation. This allowed the participants to remain with their classmates while interacting with the judges by asking questions on various topics.

Judge McCrea continues to work to advance policies, practices, and initiatives that will increase the court's ability to assist marginalized populations through better connections and an improved understanding of the community's needs.

¹⁹ The CPO Guide offers suggested practices for judicial offices to make courts fully accessible.

Bringing People Together and Building Trust

Identifying community stakeholders and building relationships based on trust is vital. Through respectful dialogue, courts can learn more about the needs of domestic violence victims from the community. Engaging with direct service provides the opportunity for critical feedback based on the actual experiences of the litigants, and it helps build connections between the court and the targeted populations.

Universal Strategies for Culture and Diversity

Strategy 1: Help build victims' trust in the civil protection order system by working to understand and eliminate impediments and biases.

Overcoming the Intimidation of the Black Robe

When speaking to a judge, people can be guarded when asked to offer critical feedback on a court process. So, while people were happy to participate in conversations or meetings, the input was sometimes sanitized. As a judicial officer, you must understand that

people (both in and out of the court system) need to trust that the information they are providing will not be used against them in some way. This is not a reflection of you as a judge, but rather, it is a view that respects the power and authority of the justice system. Building trust and forming partnerships is a process involving time and understanding. We must know that the courts are imperfect and can learn from listening to others. Creating meaningful community engagement opportunities goes a long way in building public trust.

Sustaining the Work

Institutional changes such as the revised court forms, the certification process, presentations at state and local conferences, and connections to community networks will enable the positive changes to continue and expand. Judge McCrea works to ensure the energy for the efforts continues by highlighting successes, connecting with the State Bar, having meetings that are focused and tied to an agenda, expanding the number of voices

included in the project work, and promoting shared responsibility through delegation and partnership building.

Recommendations from Judge McCrea:

- 1.** Establish a collaborative process for assessing the efficacy of the court process.
- 2.** Identify community influencers and stakeholders and build trust-based relationships through respectful dialogue. Collaboration is critical.
- 3.** Create opportunities to learn more about the needs of domestic violence victims through direct engagement with former victims, direct service providers, and first responders. Feedback from those interacting with the system is essential.

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