

ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY'S
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITY REVIEW TEAM
ANNUAL REPORT
2015

DVFRT MEMBERS

Background

In October, 2003, the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV) received a grant from the State of Maryland/Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention, which had received funding from the federal Office on Violence Against Women in order to organize and develop a local pilot Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team (DVFRT). Anne Arundel County, Maryland, was chosen to pilot the project and was active for only 5 years. In 2013 the Team reconvened and continued with the last case reviewed in 2009. Entering the third consecutive year, our focus includes domestic homicides, related suicides, and cases that present with high lethality.

Team Mission Statement

The mission of the Anne Arundel County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team is to reduce the incidence of domestic violence, to prevent the occurrence of domestic violence fatalities, and to improve the quality of life for victims of domestic violence and their families. The team will pursue its mission by committing itself to finding antecedent causes of domestic violence fatalities, by seeking to improve the coordinated community response to domestic violence, by holding abusers accountable for their actions, by recommending improvements in the criminal justice systems and civil systems that serve victims of abuse, by educating county institutions and citizens in the manner they should view domestic abuse, and by seeking to ensure compliance with its recommendations. In carrying out its mission of heightened community response, the Anne Arundel County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team hopes to free victims of domestic abuse and their families from the cycle of violence and empower them to pursue their lives without the burden of abuse.

Joan Stammnitz, Chair
Anne Arundel County Office of the State's Attorney

Rae Leonard, Vice-chair
Anne Arundel Medical Center

Michelle Smith
Anne Arundel County Office of the State's Attorney

Amanda Everly
Anne Arundel County Police Department

Karen Oliffe
Anne Arundel County Police Department

Stephanie Hinson
Anne Arundel County Police Department

John Murphy
Annapolis Police Department

Ann Potthast
YWCA Domestic Violence Program and Sexual Assault Crisis Center

Ellie Jones
Maryland Victims of Crime

Jen Corbin
Anne Arundel County Crisis Response System

Rachel Maconachy
Anne Arundel County Department of Social Services

Frances Bell
United States Naval Academy

Beth Parsons
Anne Arundel County Sheriff's Office

Shirvonda Clifton
Division of Parole and Probation

Jonas Ignatavicius
Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence

Lisa Eldridge
Anne Arundel County Department of Health

2015 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Key Finding:** When a homicide is committed in a private home or on private property, survivors are left with the responsibility of cleaning up the crime scene. At best, we have heard from survivors receiving a business card or referral for an agency from first responders. There is no regulated response to ensure proper cleaning and removal of biohazards and unsanitary conditions, or standardized information regarding costs, insurance coverage or other financial resources. In addition, having to address the aftermath creates additional trauma.

Recommendation: Research current protocols and best practices from other jurisdictions to determine feasibility of implementing a new practice, policy and/or legislative agenda.

Evidence: Testimony from first responders report that they only provide a referral in the form of a phone number or business card. Survivors' reported cleaning up the scene on their own or using a reasonably priced service that did not properly dispose of biohazards. Recent media and news reports have covered companies that charge survivors extraordinary fees and take advantage of their vulnerability. One example is a 2013 investigative report conducted by ABC News Baltimore exposing Aftermath, a large national company, accused of overcharging and taking advantage of customers.¹

Financial resources such as, Criminal Injuries Compensation Board provides a maximum of \$250.00. Homeowners' insurance coverage and deductibles vary.

In addition, exposure to the crime scene can have significant impact on the mental health of survivors. Just being exposed to the crime scene can cause devastating traumatic responses, re traumatize survivors and even add to complex PTSD.²

Action: Reach out to jurisdictions of similar size to Anne Arundel County to learn about their policies, procedures and costs. Research clean-up methods, average costs to remove biohazards, insurance reimbursement guidelines and other possible revenue resources. Compile information and review with team to discuss further recommendations.

Time frame: May, 2016 a brief progress report will be submitted to the DVFR. The progress report will include information obtained and encourage suggestions from the team. Research will be completed by September 2016 and submitted for review by DVFR by November 2016.

Person(s) Responsible: Rae Leonard and Jen Corbin will coordinate efforts to conduct research.

- 2. Key Finding:** Inadequate awareness and responsiveness regarding domestic and dating violence in the public school system. Survivors' believe that that the school system has failed to identify indicators of abuse. After multiple attempts, the AA Co DVFR and DVCC have failed to recruit a representative from the board of education.

¹ <http://www.abc2news.com/news/local-news/investigations/grief-stricken-customers-complain-about-high-bills-for-crime-scene-clean-up>

² http://www.nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Infosheet_Understanding-Traumatic-Triggers_NCDVTMH_Dec2011.pdf

Recommendation: Superintendent of Board of Education to appoint an employee from the Board of Education to sit on the Anne Arundel County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team and the Anne Arundel County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council.

Evidence: An abundance of research supports high incidences of children exposed to violence. For example, according to the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence, more than 60% of children surveyed were exposed to violence within the last year.³ Another recent survey of 550 high school counselors supports concerns regarding public schools response to violence. In the survey 81% of the 550 school counselors surveyed stated their school had no protocol to address dating violence and 75% did not have the resources to address the issue.⁴

Relatives of homicide victims expressed concerns regarding lack of intervention from the school system, when there was warning signs including behavioral changes and drop in attendance. Since 2005, multiple recruitment attempts by Anne Arundel County's Domestic Violence Coordinating Council and DVFRT have failed to achieve consistent coordination with Anne Arundel County School System.

Action: Coordinate meeting with Superintendent of Board of Education

Time frame: by March 30, 2016

Person(s) Responsible: Joan Stammnitz and Rachael Maconachy

2013 - 2015 RESOLVED RECOMMENDATIONS

Two recommendations that were quickly resolved by team:

Key Finding: Difficult to retrieve information on cases that were more than a year old.

Action to resolve: In order to gather all relevant information, cases must be selected from cases that have been recently closed or efforts must be made to preserve evidence.

Key Finding: In a case reviewed by DVFRT the abuser had a long criminal history, which resulted with him being on federal probation as well as state. Since both sentencing's required supervised monitoring with drug testing, the state worked with Federal agents to streamline the substance abuse testing. However, there came a point when federal agents refused local agents information, compromising their case management.

Action to resolve: Local Probation and Parole agents will conduct all drug testing and supervision independent of other agencies involved.

³ <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/227744.pdf>

⁴ http://www.ncdsv.org/images/Pediatrics_AdolDVaNatlAssessmentOfSchoolCounselors'PerceptionsPractices_7-2012.pdf