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Frederick County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team (FCDVFRT) 2015 Recommendations

Update on 2014 Recommendations:

Obstacle addressed: Interagency Communication

Recommendation: Work with all partnering agencies to increase knowledge and communication about high-risk offenders and victims.

Update: A portion of our FCDVFRT meetings have included discussing the feasibility of creating a high-risk offender list which would be shared amongst law enforcement agencies. Initial background research has been conducted by contacting other agencies to see how they create and manage such a list. At this time, more work needs to be done to compile and finalize a Frederick County high-risk offender list.

During one particular FCDVFRT Case Review, it was recognized that the allied agencies involved worked well in unison to protect a victim from potential lethality. After reviewing this case, the team recognized this as the standard for which we would like to see all cases handled. This included effective communication between the State's Attorney's Office, Frederick Police Department, Frederick County Sheriff's Office, Heartly House, and the Division of Parole and Probation.

Obstacle addressed: Public Awareness

Recommendation: Increasing awareness amongst local therapists, counselors, social workers, and family law attorneys on recognizing and addressing domestic violence in their client's lives and supplying them with appropriate referral sources in the community.

Update: On October 23rd, 2015, members from the FCDVFRT, in conjunction with the Frederick County Sheriff's Office and the Frederick County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council (FCDVCC), held a one-day training targeting social workers, school counselors, victim advocates, and therapists to provide education on the short-term and long-term effects of children witnessing domestic violence, as well as possible interventions. This conference was well attended by many members of the Frederick County community.

Additionally, in 2015, Heartly House presented to numerous colleges, universities, and secondary schools, including Hood College, Frederick Community College, Mount St. Mary's University, Frederick County Public Schools, and St. John's Catholic Prep. Heartly House has presented to numerous

partnering agencies and organizations, including the Frederick County Health Department, Fort Detrick, the Mental Health Associated, the Frederick Center, and various churches.

2015 Recommendations Overview:

Education on Strangulation

Obstacle #1: Presently, there has been a lack of education and awareness in the Frederick County Community in regards to the lethality risk associated with strangulation. Earlier this year, members of our team attended a conference in San Diego, California, to further their knowledge on medically treating, prosecuting, and advocating in domestic violence cases with strangulation incidents. Upon returning, the lack of medical follow-up and prosecution associated with identified strangulation cases was recognized as an increased risk for victims of intimate partner violence. In one case reviewed by the FCDVFRT this year, it was pointed out that the victim had identified in a Lethality Screen that she had been “choked” or strangled by her partner, which we now know can be extremely lethal. This led to a discussion amongst the FCDVFRT of the importance of organizing trainings for those who come into contact with domestic violence victims on assessing for these types of injuries.

Recommendation: The FCDVFRT will invite those members who attended the training in San Diego to attend a meeting in order to provide strangulation training to the remaining members of the team. The FCDVFRT will support these members as they work to educate law enforcement, victim advocates, Communication Specialists, and forensic nurses in the area of strangulation risk, evaluation, and prosecution. The law enforcement affiliated members of FCDVFRT will also work with their agencies to discuss the feasibility of adding an additional line of questioning on the lethality screens specific to strangulation cases in order to more immediately address the victim’s medical needs.

Long-Term Follow-Up with Victims of Domestic Violence

Obstacle #1: Due to turnover in the field of victim services, and relocation of a victim, the FCDVFRT found what appeared to be gaps in services when an offender is incarcerated for longer periods of time. However, the FCDVFRT noticed through a case review potential safety risks are still present upon an offender’s release, even multiple years later. The members of FCDVFRT all agreed that local law enforcement and victim advocates need to be made aware of the offender’s release, the name of the victim, and current locations of victim (if available) so that additional safety measures can be put in place with those victims in the communities in which they reside.

Recommendation: Invite members of the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services Victim Services team to attend a FCDVFRT meeting to learn more about their services and notification process to victims of domestic violence upon offender release. Additionally, we will work with members of the Division of Parole and Probation to identify ways to keep victim advocates aware of domestic violence offenders who are re-entering the community in which the victims currently resides.