

# **ZERO TOLERANCE FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN CONTRA COSTA COUNTY: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH**

\*Elinor J. Marcelous, MS

## **Executive Summary**

### **BACKGROUND**

Every nine seconds a woman is beaten somewhere in the United States according to the American Institute on Domestic Violence.

This case study examines how Contra Costa County approached escalating domestic violence through an exemplary, multidisciplinary approach.

Although law enforcement and communitybased organizations had identified reducing family violence, domestic violence and elder abuse as a priority and had devoted significant resources and effort toward reducing these crimes, domestic violence, family violence and elder abuse were on the rise in Contra Costa County.

The number of domestic violence arrests in 1998 was 154% higher than the number of arrests in 1988. Children were present in one of every three domestic violence incidents reported to the County between 1997-1999. Three out of five domestic violence incidents reported to law enforcement agencies involved parties with a prior history of domestic violence.

The "Zero Tolerance Initiative" was the brainchild of one of Contra Costa County's own elected officials, Donna Gerber. Built on a history of hard work done by existing public and private entities in the County, "Zero Tolerance" caught the wave of public interest and awareness. The timing could not have been better. The political climate was just right. Fueled by considerable effort and genuine commitment from many people and places, "Zero Tolerance" took the already significant efforts to address domestic violence to another level.

In February 2000 the Contra Costa Board of Supervisor declared a policy of "Zero Tolerance" for domestic violence. In so doing, Contra Costa became the first county in California with a coordinated, comprehensive, multidisciplinary, multi-jurisdictional partnership devoted to addressing and eliminating domestic violence, family violence and elder abuse. The partners in the initiative include the Superior Court, the Sheriffs, District Attorney and Public Defender's Offices, the Employment and Human Services, Probation and Health Departments. Also included are several community-based service providers, STAND! Against Domestic Violence, Elder Abuse Prevention Consortium and the Bay Area Legal Service Foundation.

The "Zero Tolerance" initiative was formulated and coordinated by a team in the County Administrator's Office that had researched best practices statewide and interviewed local staff in all the participating agencies.

The initial activities toward implementation of "Zero Tolerance" - hiring and training staff, development of contracts and planning for the provision of services - began in October, 2000. The fiscal commitment from the County Board of Supervisors was huge. It should be duly noted

\* Elinor Marcelous is a Program Manager in Marin County Health and Human Services, Child Protective Services.

that the Board of Supervisors requires quarterly progress reports on performance measures, challenges and accomplishments as well as future planning. "Zero Tolerance" is closely monitored. It is anticipated that a coordinator for the program will be hired in the near future to keep the program on track toward an unprecedented success.

Some notable measures of the success of this initiative to date are:

- Initial Sheriff's data showed a doubled rate of misdemeanor domestic violence filings attributable to increased capacity for investigating domestic violence offenses.
- The number of misdemeanor domestic violence cases filed by the DA went from 664 in the baseline year to 708 in the first tracking year.
- The District Attorney's Elder Abuse Unit posted 14 convictions in its first 90 days of operation and established an elder abuse hotline.
- The West County Restraining Order Clinic prepared 119 processed domestic violence orders in the first 3 months of "Zero Tolerance". An astonishing 72% of the orders processed in the Richmond Court during this period were prepared through the Clinic.
- This "Zero Tolerance" initiative is a longterm investment in the health, safety and well being of Contra Costa County's most vulnerable victims - children, elders and women.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR MARIN COUNTY**

Demographically and geographically Contra Costa County and Marin County are worlds apart. We do, however, share a commitment to the interdisciplinary approach to systemic issues. Our model program in that vein is our Multidisciplinary Forensic Interview Center. Health and Human Services represented, by none other than myself, sits on the Steering Committee that includes the District Attorney's Office - Victim - Witness, Law Enforcement and Marin Advocates for Children. We have experienced success in bringing about change through collaboration.

In Marin we realize that not all domestic violence victims are poor, minority, uneducated or substance abusers. None of us are so naive as to believe that stereotype. At this point in time Marin County has various agencies committed to the fight against domestic violence. And they are doing some good work.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO MARIN COUNTY**

I recommend the following:

- That the Executive Management Team of Health and Human Services continues supporting the practice of addressing systemic issues in a multidisciplinary fashion.

- That the Executive Management Team of Health and Human Services mandate that intake forms in Eligibility, Cal-Works, Adult Protective Services, Child Protective and the Marin Maternity Clinic include the question "Have you ever experienced, or witnessed, domestic violence in your home?"
- That positive responses be documented and reported to a designated person every three months for a period of no less than six months.
- That at the end of six month the designated person passes this information to the Executive Board for your consideration.

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**INTRODUCTION**

In selecting a project for my BASSC Internship, I chose to examine how a large, diverse county formulated a multidisciplinary approach to begin to break the progressive cycle of domestic violence, family violence and elder abuse. What did it take to have public agencies, private agencies and the community come together to make the enhancements and changes necessary to protect those who could not protect themselves? The challenges were many, but the shared determination to make a difference was compelling. Here is how Contra Costa County made a difference.

**BACKGROUND**

Like bittersweet or benevolent sabotage, domestic violence is an oxymoron. Simply stated, every individual, no matter the gender, age or condition, should be safe from any assault at home. Any other reality should not make sense. However, the American Institute on Domestic Violence tells us that every nine seconds a woman is beaten somewhere in these United States. Domestic violence is defined as intentionally or recklessly causing, or attempting to cause, bodily injury, or placing another person in reasonable apprehension of imminent serious bodily injury. The victim is a spouse, cohabitant or a person who is dependent on the perpetrator.

The Board of Supervisors in Contra Costa County in its infinite wisdom decided that it was time for a change. In 1999 incidents of domestic violence, family violence and elder abuse were on the rise.

The number of domestic violence arrests in 1998 was 154% higher than the number of arrests in 1988. Children were present in one of every three domestic violence incidents reported to law enforcement between 1997 to 1999. Three out of five incidents reported involved parties with a prior history of domestic violence.

The cost in human terms - death, incarceration, prosecution, injury, broken homes and traumatized victims-was sky-high. The fiscal cost to the County was equally daunting

considering consequent emergency medical care and high cost services in the criminal justice system. Funding was likewise crisis-oriented, directed at the aftermath of domestic violence and not at its prevention. The good news was that collaboration and protocols on which to build were already in existence.

## **IMPLEMENTING "ZERO TOLERANCE"**

It was one of Contra Costa County's own elected officials, Donna Gerber, who brought before the Board of Supervisors the resolution that led to the policy of Zero Tolerance for Domestic Violence. This was declared in February 2000. The process for the realization of Zero Tolerance was put in the hands of a team of three staff from the County Administrator's office with considerable expertise in three areas - county administration, fiscal and program administration.

First the County Administrator's office had meetings with all of their department heads to get them on board with concept and the reality of Zero Tolerance. Meanwhile the implementation team, seeking as broad an input as possible, set out to interview the other public and private entities that were involved with domestic violence. This included, but may not have been limited to, the Offices of the District Attorney, Public Defender and the Sheriff, each local Police Department and the Courts. Several key community-based organizations were likewise contacted. They were STAND! Against Domestic Violence, which is the organization that ran the women's shelter in Contra Costa, the Elder Abuse Prevention Consortium and The Bay Area Legal Service Foundation. They did not stop there. The implementation team sought out other counties who had some success at stopping the cycle of domestic violence. They contacted Orange County, San Diego County, as well as San Francisco and Santa Clara County.

The implementation team soon realized that they did not need to develop or invent something new. As previously stated, there were already significant efforts in place to address domestic violence and they were collaborating. Statistics were being gathered and shared. When individual agencies were approached with the idea of "Zero Tolerance" according to Chris Linville, Deputy County Administrator and part of the implementation team, "there were surprisingly few turf issues". The task was to package Zero Tolerance in such a way that the entire system would be in agreement that no other design could be successful. That having been accomplished, next came the question of how the initiative would be funded. In other words, would the county demonstrate a fiscal commitment to "Zero Tolerance"? The answer was a resounding "yes".

Contra Costa County devoted almost all of its discretionary money to the initiative. Approximately \$2,000,000 annually in County General Funds and existing revenue streams are committed to finance the "Zero Tolerance" initiative. This funding supports approximately twenty-two new positions, technology improvements, staff training, community capacity-building and increased enforcement costs. Annual costs are allocated as follows:

Sheriff (\$464,000)	\$151,500	Victim Protection
	215,000	Domestic Violence Unit
	97,500	Data Enhancements
District Attorney	\$324,000	Misdemeanor and Elder Abuse Prosecution
Public Defender	\$103,000	Increased Legal Representation Costs
Probation (\$479,000)	\$187,000	Felony Intensive Supervision
	78,000	Victim/Witness Services
	214,000	Misdemeanor Probation Services
Courts (\$113,500)	\$ 52,500	Victim Restraining Order/Filing Assistance
	82,000	Restraining Order Clinic Pilot Project
Human Svcs. (\$328,000)	\$103,000	Child Protective Service DV Liaisons
	225,000	CalWORKS (TANF) DV Liaisons
Health Services	\$100,000	Physician/Medical Service Provider Training
Community Svcs.	\$200,000	Victim and Children Svcs./ ElderAbuse Svcs.

## **SOCIAL SERVICES**

The training needs were huge. Where do you start? Who gets training? What is the content of the training? It did all come together eventually. For example, the Adult and Aging Services Bureau, under the leadership of the Division Manager, Linda Anderson, contracted with STAND! Against Domestic Violence, the local non-profit agency serving victims of domestic violence. STAND! was contracted to provide 6hour training sessions with specific emphasis on intimate partner abuse within the elder adult community. Over 100 staff attended these sessions. Adult and Aging Services Bureau also contracted with Elder Abuse Prevention Consortium, another local non-profit, to arrange for single topic intensives presented by nationally known experts.

Topics were:

- Dynamics of Abuse in Later Life
- Undue Influence in Elder Abuse
- Criminal Prosecution of Elder Abuse

The criminal prosecution workshop was presented by Paul Greenwood the Chair of the California District Attorneys' Elder Abuse Prosecutors Association. He has headed the Elder Abuse Unit of the San Diego county District Attorney's Office since its inception in January 1996. There were also community workshops to increase public awareness of elder abuse. STAND! was further contracted to provide relevant and equally state-of-the art, trainings to Child and Family Services and Workforce Services including Medi-Cal and Food Stamp eligibility workers.

It should be duly noted that STAND! had a significant charge beyond the awesome responsibility of training of participants. Other responsibilities included, but might not have been limited to, developing forms and procedures to receive referrals, describing and developing the integrated case management process, collecting data hiring, domestic violence liaisons to be out-stationed in various county sites and last, but not least, providing a successful Domestic Violence

Treatment Program to clients who are also Child and Family Services clients. An outline of training provided according to the contractual relationship is attached do this study.

## **LAW ENFORCEMENT**

On the Law Enforcement side of "Zero Tolerance" the Sheriff's Office added a sergeant to its domestic violence investigative team bringing the number of members to five. Patrol officers trained to document and investigate domestic violence began handing out brochures about police protection and legal remedies to victims. The District Attorney's Office, which prosecutes misdemeanor and felony domestic violence cases, now has a deputy assigned to the domestic violence court. This office also prosecutes elder abuse cases, both financial and physical, as part of the "Zero Tolerance" program. The Domestic Violence Restraining Order Clinic, which operates out of the court's Richmond branch, helps victims submit their requests for orders and offers much needed support. The focus is shifted to those who commit misdemeanors - an early intervention approach. Offenders must attend a 52-week counseling program as part of their probation. Offenders are actively supervised by their Probation Officers. Another significant change from the crisis-oriented approach in which only the worse offenders received significant attention and services. Offenders are also required to make regular appearances in Domestic Violence court. This Court, which began in January of 2001, meets every Friday. The intent of the enhanced legal system intervention is to reduce recidivism by creating a controlled environment of service, with consequences. Domestic violence offenders now account for 20 percent of the Public Defender's caseload, up from 12 percent in the first six months of: "Zero Tolerance".

An existing centralized computer system (Sheriff's Domestic Violence Tracking System) which retains domestic violence reports and supplemental information from multiple law enforcement agencies county-wide was refurbished and enhance so there would be practically no "falling through the cracks".

Victims are not overlooked. Victim-Witness staff now contacts victims of misdemeanor domestic violence crimes letting them know of money and services that are available to help them whether they need counseling or relocation. Up to \$10,000 may be available for each family per domestic violence incident in the first 60 days of outreach over 160 such victims were contacted.

## **OBSERVATIONS / CONCLUSIONS**

The "Zero Tolerance for Domestic Violence" is a huge system wide effort that takes into account the role of each partner working to reduce the crime, violence and trauma related to domestic and family violence and elder abuse. It took the vision of the Board of Supervisors and the coordination of the County Administrator's Office to pull together resources that had some gaps and successfully integrate them into what promises to be an exemplary program. I am impressed with both the vision that permitted "Zero Tolerance" and the tremendous commitment and work that has brought it thus far. "Zero Tolerance" has not been in effect long enough to determine its long-range success, it is still in its infancy. However, by all indications, it seems to have a bright

future. Some areas of concern would be the availability of adequate resources and services to clients, the resiliency of STAND! and the budgetary challenges down the road. Time will tell.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR MARIN COUNTY**

Demographically and geographically Contra Costa County and Marin County are worlds apart. Perhaps the most important lesson Marin could learn from "Zero Tolerance" is how valuable it is to work toward true multidisciplinary efforts to address issues that cross real and imagined boundaries. I also believe that the Marin County Board of Supervisors has the capacity to be supportive when presented with excellent ideas for making our communities safe and healthy. Actually, in Marin, we have experienced great success in addressing Child Sexual Abuse, and other child abuse, via the multidisciplinary approach of our Forensic Interview Center. I am pleased to represent Health and Human Services on that Steering Committee which includes the District Attorney, the Marin County Sheriff's Office, Law Enforcement, and Marin Advocates for Children. The Steering Committee also has memorandum of understanding with Public Health for related services.

We also have a number of agencies doing noble work in the area of domestic violence. While I do not feel that now is the time to take on domestic violence as Contra Costa is doing, I am pleased to share the concept and success of "Zero Tolerance" in Contra Costa County. Perhaps I am, unknowingly, planting a seed for the future.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- That the Executive Management Team of Health and Human Services continues supporting the practice of addressing systemic issues in a multidisciplinary fashion.
- That the Executive Management Team mandates that intake forms in Eligibility, CalWorks, Adult Protective Services and Child Protective Services and Marin Maternity Services be amended to include the questions "Have you ever experienced or witness domestic violence in your home"?
- That positive responses to the question be documented and reported to a designated person every three months for a period of no less than six months.
- That the designated person pass this information to the Executive Board for consideration.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to sincerely thank Contra Costa County in general for their kindness, hospitality and patience as I went about my gathering of information. Specifically, I must thank Chris Linville, Deputy County Administrator, who, by all reports, has served as the hub of the wheel in the formulation and implementation of "Zero Tolerance". Thank you also to Linda Anderson, Division Manager, Aging & Adult Services who proved a model of patience, to Debbie Moss, division Manager, Children and Family Services who is an alumnus of the Executive

Development Class. Last, but certainly not least, Betty Wilgus, Administrative Assistant, Adult and Aging was most accommodating.