

# **Contra Costa County Family Justice Center - More than Collaboration, an Ecosystem for Survivors**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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In 2020, there were 160,646 Domestic Abuse-related calls for service in the State of California (CDC, 2022). Many cases of Domestic Violence or Interpersonal Violence (IPV) go unreported each year because the victims do not feel like they have a place to go or somewhere to get the support needed to get out of the situation. This societal issue is the basis for the Family Justice Center movement that started in San Diego County and is now moving throughout the world.

As an Executive Committee member for the newly opened Family Justice Center in Napa (the Monarch Justice Center), this is a topic that hits close to home. This is a brief review of how the Family Justice Center in Contra Costa County went from a small collaborative of five partners working to help victims in the community to an ecosystem of over 65 partners that are now supporting and engaging a community to help survivors.

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## Introduction

The Family Justice Center model was first introduced in San Diego County in 1989. The vision for such a center was developed under the idea that “victims would have an easier time receiving needed services if they only had to go to one place to get all the necessary help” (Casey Gwinn, 2016). This way of thinking evolved over several years until the opening of the first Family Justice Center in 2002. Based on the success of the Family Justice Center in San Diego, then-President George W. Bush created the President’s Family Justice Center Initiative. This Initiative provided funds to develop another fifteen centers across the nation. The mission of the Family Justice Center movement - to provide support to victims in a multi-disciplinary setting - has now resulted in Family Justice Centers opening Worldwide.

Napa County Leaders started “dreaming about a better way to serve our community in late 2014” (Monarch Justice Center). Our then-District Attorney, Gary Lieberstein, engaged with many other community partners to discuss and plan for making the “lives of victims easier” (Lieberstein, 2014). The concept of a Family Justice Center was not new to Napa County at the time. Napa County’s collaborative service partners had been coming together regularly since 2010, as a formal multi-disciplinary team (MDT). The partners included the City of Napa Police Department, Napa County Sheriff Department, Napa County District Attorney’s Office, Napa Emergency Women’s Services (NEWS), Napa County Probation Department, Legal Aid Napa Valley (which has transitioned to Bay Area

Legal Aid), Family Court Services, Napa County Health and Human Services, and Napa County DA’s Victim/Witness Services Program. Although this had improved communication, it had not integrated systems and services.

With this strong foundation of collaboration in Napa County and the support and assistance from the Alliance for Hope, Napa County started the process of engaging the community around assessing the needs of and support for victims in 2016. This community engagement lead to the opening of the Monarch Justice Center in 2019. The Monarch Justice center, with the dedication of our key partners, carries the vision:

We envision a community that is safe and free from violence and victimization. We aim to create a collaborative community that works together to ensure that **all** survivors have access to equal justice and to the resources they need to heal and thrive (Monarch Justice Center, 2019).

The Monarch Justice Center has experienced some obstacles in providing the needed services to the vulnerable populations in Napa County. As budgets constrict, funding opportunities get more limited, and agencies focus more on their basic services. This has left the Monarch Justice Center with “core” providers supporting the work needed to help victims become survivors. On top of that, throw in a global pandemic, and now even basic supports are hard to come by.

As part of the Bay Area Social Service Consortium (BASSC) Executive Development Program, I was immediately

drawn to focus my project on the success that has occurred over the years at the Contra Costa Family Justice Center (FJC). The Contra Costa County Family Justice Center started as a “dream” of the Zero Tolerance for Domestic Violence Initiative (Zero Tolerance). Zero Tolerance was an initiative established by the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors in 2001. Zero Tolerance focused on a plan to “facilitate, coordinate, and incubate improved service delivery systems and policy to support the County’s strong stance against family violence and abuse” (Contra Costa Family Justice Alliance Document). Through this work, Zero Tolerance was able to bring the community together to develop and implement the first Family Justice Center in Contra Costa County in 2011. The Family Justice Center in Contra Costa County has grown from a temporary center in 2011 to a Center that now has three different permanent sites throughout Contra Costa County. The Contra Costa Family Justice Center, also, started with a small “core” group of partners back in 2011 and now has 30 on-site partners and 19+ off-site partners.

The tremendous growth of the Contra Costa FJC did not just happen over the years. There were many strategic processes involved to assure all aspects of a victim’s situation could be supported at all three sites and “push the needle” to help individuals become survivors. I had the excellent opportunity to meet with the Executive Director of the Contra Costa County Family Justice Center, Susun Kim. If you have not had the opportunity to meet Susun, I highly recommend that you make the time. During our meeting, it became apparent that everything that Susun does and talks about is a model of Collective Impact (her bio on

the website even refers to Collective Impact as one of her joys). While I came to the meeting with plans and questions about budgets and growth, what I got was a master class on community engagement and developing an ecosystem for survivors.

The Contra Costa County Family Justice Center has strong roots in Social Impact. When you look through their resources, website, or even their Strategic Plan, you start to count the number of times that you read the three C-words (community, collaboration, and cooperation). This is not done by accident. These are the values that are shared by each staff member of the Center and also the partners involved in supporting their Mission. But more than that, what has developed over time is a community that shares in these values.

The Collective Impact model was first discussed by the Foundation Strategy Group and was published in the 2011 Stanford Social Innovation Review (Kania, J. & Kramer, M., 2011). The model discusses key components for impacting substantial change in a community. These key components are: A Common Agenda, Shared Measurement, Mutually Reinforcing Activities, Continuous Communication, and Backbone Support. The focus of Collective Impact is to break down silos that occur in government and non-profit organizations and focus on making larger change within communities around major societal issues. The result of Collective Impact is Systems Change.

## **Collective Impact at the Contra Costa County Family Justice Center**

### **A Common Agenda**

As noted above, the Collective Impact model is well integrated into every aspect of the daily activities of the Contra Costa County Family Justice Center. While there is much data to support the needs of a Family Justice Center in all communities, this is a specific focus on the community in Contra Costa County. The private/public partnership that has come together, understands the benefits to victims getting the needed support in their “time of need”. The focus on daily operations and fiscal limitations is removed to increase the larger vision of the needs of the community. This is something that Susan and her team continuously monitor each month.

Before the first client was served at the Contra Costa County FJC, much of the work was done to evaluate the need in the community, the existing services, and the community partners needed to make the “dream” a reality. The Zero Tolerance initiative, with the support of the Glen Price Group (GPG), was strategic in its focus. They laid out a plan for specific “Phases” that occurred over the next two years (Contra Costa Family Justice Alliance, 2016). The three phases focused on Discovery, Design, and Engagement. While exploring the needs in the community, this gave the group an opportunity to also engage the Partners. During the three phases, the focus remained on the Common Agenda that a Family Justice Center was the best option for a community to support victims, provide safety to victims, and move victims to a path of self-sufficiency.

During the Design phase, the development of the governance structure was the focus. Again, this gave the group the ability to engage the community and look strategically at who should be involved in providing the

long-term representation of the Board. They recommended having a hybrid model of governance that would have Institutional seats. These Institutional seats would be for Board of Supervisors, Mayors and City Council members, etc. With these seats, came the investment from the individuals that have the ability to influence and affect change with budgeting, long-term planning, and community support. This design has proved to be a vital aspect of the long-term success of the Contra Costa County FJC. With the engagement of County/City Leadership, the FJC is a focus for all levels of government.

## **Shared Measurement**

Sharing common data and measurement tools is something that government and non-profit agencies struggle with on a yearly basis. Once again because reporting requirements for grants or state budgets are very specific, there are no other items that are measured on a yearly basis. If you look at the Annual Report for the Contra Costa County FJC, you can see that the measures are very precise in telling the story and impact of the Centers. These measures are all items that most, if not all, partners are already reporting for other reasons. There is an emphasis on who was served, who they are, and what they needed. Having impactful data points allows for the FJC to easily report the work that is being done and also limits the stress on Partner Agencies.

## **Mutually Reinforcing Activities**

The Contra Costa County FJC uses the above-mentioned subcommittees to really focus on the activities supporting the community. Each Partner Agency has its own daily duties and mandated program

deliverables. With mutually reinforcing activities, the expertise of each agency is leveraged to benefit the entire system. This cross-sectional approach provides for a diverse group of stakeholders to work on specific goals to impact the overarching strategic plan of the FJC.

This is coordinated by the staff at the Contra Costa County FJC. When meeting with Partner Agencies and community members, there is a strong understanding of the expertise each agency brings to the table. Each agency is evaluated for its ability to react to and support the goals of the larger Mission/Vision of the Centers. The coordination of these activities is no small feat. Through continuous collaboration and communication, the skills of each agency are leveraged to work efficiently and effectively for the support of each client. In the Contra Costa County FJC Strategic Plan 2018-2022, they discussed the idea that “no one organization can do all these functions; it requires a broad ecosystem of services and support” (FJC Strategic Plan 2018-2022).

## **Continuous Communication**

The Contra Costa County Family Justice Center holds a bi-annual Partner’s Meeting. This meeting is developed to have all the partners come together to discuss new issues and resolve system concerns. This is also a space for the Family Justice Center to give updates or changes in process. Since the Partner’s Meeting includes so many organizations, this meeting is very structured and specific in the context of what each Partner needs to know. The other meetings that take place in the community are where the real coordination and collaboration take shape.

The Contra Costa County FJC has monthly, if not more often, subcommittee meetings. These meetings are specific to the areas that each partner plays in the community outside their work in the FJC. These smaller groups allow the FJC to focus on specific needs in the community and develop policies on how to resolve these matters. The subcommittees’ work then informs the bigger group on things that need to be changed or areas for more focus. The idea of such meetings allows for these smaller groups to get together in a quicker, more efficient manner to focus on the work at hand. These smaller groups have led to the FJC starting new Initiatives to focus on specific needs. The Contra Costa County FJC now has an Elder Abuse Prevention Project and a Legal Incubator Program which provides free legal services to the clients while giving needed experience to young lawyers.

As stated above, there are multiple Partner’s Meetings and subcommittee meetings that occur throughout the year. These meetings are developed to look at larger systems matters and also for specific client needs. These meetings are also used as a continuous feedback loop for all the Partners involved to better support and evolve to meet the needs of the community. While the Contra Costa County FJC’s main focus is on navigation for the clients served, the real impact is from the idea that each Partner Agency is “on the same page”.

In the coming years, the Contra Costa County FJC is looking to engage more with the community as a whole. The focus will be on having more community dialogue around the issue of Domestic Violence and Interpersonal Violence (IPV). This community approach will result in “shifts in

attitudes and culture around IPV and other violence issues, and linkages between the IPV issue and other violence and social issues and problems faced by clients and families” (FJC Strategic Plan 2018-2022). By looking to the community to be the “upstream” investment needed, the outcome will be more individuals accessing services earlier, getting the needed services more easily, and gaining future support to become survivors.

## **Backbone Support**

While the Contra Costa County FJC provides much of the backbone support to the Partners and the community, there has been a shift in developing more capacity with the Partner Agencies. Backbone support is the key aspect to making such a change in the community. Many of us refuse to “raise our hand” or come up with a new idea, knowing that we will be the one that has to take this project on. Structured support, allows the Partner Agencies to focus on the work at hand and not on who is going to coordinate the next meeting or MDT.

## **Recommendations for the Monarch Justice Center**

There were many takeaways from my conversations with the Contra Costa County FJC staff and my visit to one of the Centers. With all the documentation that was provided, there is a road map that would meet the needs of a “new” Family Justice Center from the experience and success of an “established” Family Justice Center. While I would like to jump right in and start the process of change, I am aware that many of these steps will take time and there is a need to engage other agencies and Partners

to assure that they are successful. When looking at the Contra Costa Family Justice Alliance Recommendations, there are some steps that the Monarch needs to take and some steps that were missed in the initial process.

1. **Discovery** - There currently is a “core” group of service providers that are supporting the daily activities within the Monarch Center. We will need to do more “discovery” on current committees/collaboratives, that are already currently meeting, and that have ties to the areas of focus of the Monarch Justice Center. The four pillars of the Monarch Justice Center are Human Trafficking, Elder/Dependent Adult Abuse, Domestic Violence (DV), and Sexual Assault. Our current Director is working with our “core” Partner, NEWS, to look at the service partners in the area of DV and Sexual Assault. Our Director has also started to attend meetings in our community around Elder/Dependent Adult Abuse and Older Adult matters. The focus in the coming months will be to get Monarch staff engaged in these meetings and working with the community partners to start the discussion of a common agenda. While building these relationships, the focus will also look at current activities in each pillar and align them into mutually reinforcing activities.
2. **Design** - The current structure of governance at the Monarch Center is not a long-term solution and will not provide the needed support for long-term success. As we start the process of applying for the 501(c)(3),



the Executive Committee will need to develop a plan for Board recruitment and planning. Currently, the Executive Committee has some “feelers” out in the community; however, to be successful, we will need to be more strategic about the individuals in our community that we approach about being a part of the Board. The Contra Costa County FJC Recommendations on having Institutional seats is something that was new to me and will likely be something that the Monarch Executive Committee will incorporate into our future process. Having these Institutional seats will allow for Elected Officials, County/City Leadership to be involved in growing and sustaining the Mission of the Monarch Center. By having the “buy-in” from individuals that can affect change with budgets and community participation, we can hope this will evolve to support the Monarch Center more in the future.

3. **Engagement** - While the Contra Costa County FJC is working to engage more of the community, the Monarch Justice Center is still fairly new to people and we will need to spend more time engaging our community partners. Once we can determine the landscape of our community partners, we can then shift our focus to engaging the community and potential funders. During the engagement phase, the focus will be on “bridging the gaps” of services. The Family Justice Center model is unique in the ability to bring together people with expertise and work on each matter on a client-centered basis. Much of the

work will be around creating a Common Agenda and having Continuous Communication. While Napa County is known to be a very collaborative community, we will need to focus on having more discussions around breaking down the silos that limit the success of our clients and limit the ability of victims to move towards being survivors.

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