



Janesville Police Department

Domestic Violence Intervention Team

2012

J. Robert Havlick and Thomas H. Muehlenbeck

Innovation Award Application

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The Janesville Police Department's Domestic Violence Intervention (DVI) team was implemented in February 2010 with the goal to reduce the number of domestic violence incidents in the City of Janesville. Domestic violence is often a repeatable occurrence and it seemed to the Department as though many victims were not using the support services available to them. The DVI team officers review all domestic violence related police reports and then conduct follow up contact with the victims. We hope to reduce domestic violence incidents by increasing victim utilization of local resources while providing prosecutors with highly detailed investigative reports so that repeat offenders can be prosecuted. The DVI team partners with community organizations including the YWCA, local hospitals, and the Office of the District Attorney to aid in accomplishing this goal.

Background

The City of Janesville is a community of 62,000 residents located in south central Wisconsin. The police department has 104 sworn officers. On average, the police department responds to over 600 domestic related incidents a year. Two-thirds of Janesville's homicides have been domestic related. In 2009, a 25 year old female was shot to death in front of her young son in front of their home. The suspect was the female's estranged boyfriend. This incident prompted the Janesville Police Department to review how it handles domestic violence incidents. An internal review showed that on the front end we, the police department, were doing what was required of us by statute; including responding to the incident, conducting an investigation, and completing a mandatory arrest of the primary aggressor. Furthermore, responding officers were providing the victim with information on victim's rights and the YWCA. What happened after the officers left was unknown.

The idea was generated to have a police officer follow up with each victim within 72 hours of the police report. (72 hrs is the required time a person arrested for domestic violence in Wisconsin is required to avoid contacting the victim.) The officer would then be able to speak with the victim in a more relaxed setting without the suspect being present. The officer would be able to re-offer the services of the YWCA and the Victim/Witness office, review safety planning, conduct follow up questions and/or obtain additional photos of injuries if needed.

Implementation

It became clear after the internal review that a program such as the DVI team was needed. As officers began to follow up with the victim, they discovered that many of the victims had forgotten what the original officers had told them or had questions on where to turn next. Approximately 25% of the victims agreed to meet with a YWCA advocate. Other victims who initially declined the offer for assistance later went to the YWCA and/or the Victim/Witness office.

DVI officers also discovered the "72hr no contact provision" was frequently violated, often by the suspect calling from the jail. In one case, a victim had been strangled by her live-in boyfriend. This was his second arrest for strangulation of her. The DVI officers were suspicious as to why the victim was suddenly downplaying the seriousness of what happened. An officer checked jail phone records for the suspect and found he attempted to call the victim over 50 times within twenty-four hours. When the victim finally accepted a call from the suspect, the officer listened to the recording and heard the suspect pleading with the victim to change her original story to the police. The DVI officer arrested the suspect for violating the



“72hr no contact provision” of the domestic violence statute. In addition, information from the call was passed on to the suspect’s probation officer as well as the prosecutors. After the victim was told this information, she was able to confidently tell the suspect that it was “too late” for her to change her story.

Community Involvement

In order for the DVI team to succeed, the support and cooperation of others in the community was essential. First, we needed help from the YWCA; namely in their ability to be available to work with a victim whenever requested. Second, we decided it would be beneficial to bring together all the key stakeholders. This community wide DVI Team meets once every two months and has expanded to include representatives from The Victim/Witness office, the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) from the local hospital, Child Protective Services, Probation and Parole, and most recently an assistant District Attorney. More importantly, everyone in the group can now direct victims to specific individuals who can help them more easily navigate the criminal justice system and obtain community resources.



Officer Laurie Valley meets with a victim along with YWCA representatives

Why Our Program is Unique

While domestic violence Coordinated Community Response (CCR) groups exist in many areas, including our own county, this is the first program that we have found that started by taking a look at how domestic violence cases are handled on the front line by the police department. Our police department thoroughly reviewed how services for the victims could be improved, starting first with the police department’s policies and procedures. We were not satisfied with only a few officers becoming specially trained to handle domestic violence incidents; rather, the entire department needed to be able to address the issue of domestic violence in a pro-active manner. We knew that if we wanted to empower a victim to make a change in his/her life, we had to provide immediate support, and then carry it through with the help of the DVI team and other community agencies. To aid in meeting this goal, all Janesville police officers, Rock County prosecutors, child protective services agents, Probation and Parole agents and 911 communicators attended an eight hour training on domestic violence. The training, held in February of 2011, was paid for through funding by the Wisconsin Office for Justice Assistance.

Who Benefits?

The obvious primary beneficiaries of our DVI program are the victims of domestic violence. As one victim stated, “It is really nice that I’m not alone and I can be safe in my home”. However, there are many other beneficiaries most importantly being the children of victims who often witness these incidents. We hope that children will see early on that domestic violence is not acceptable behavior, and that help is available for them and their families.

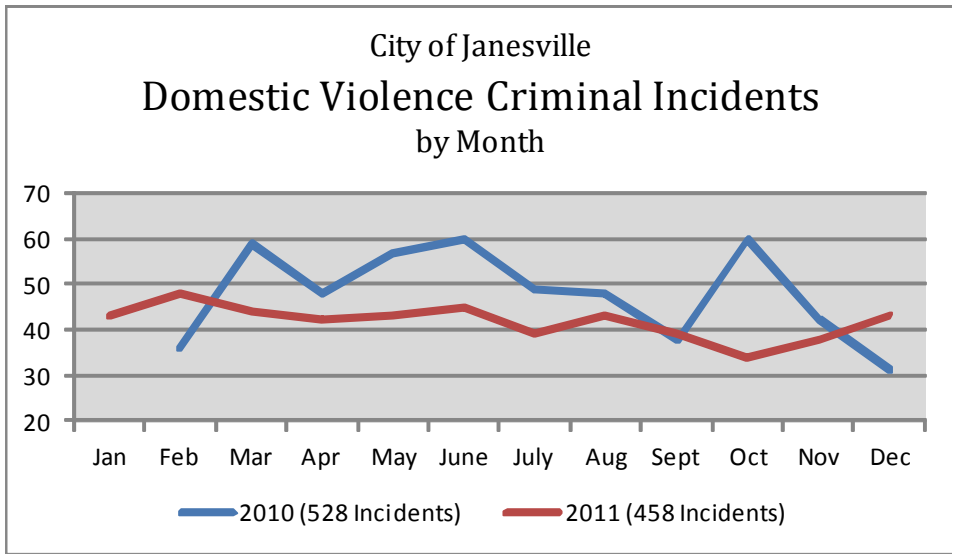
The YWCA has also benefitted with an increase in walk-in clients and the validation of their mission that comes from working in partnership with the police department. Since the inception of the DVI program, the YWCA has doubled their citizen contacts. The police department has benefitted by getting to better know the service agencies in the community and the resources they can provide.



Finally, the entire community becomes safer when we have fewer domestic violence incidents. When the homicide occurred in 2009, the suspect fled the scene in a pick-up truck. The suspect subsequently engaged officers from several jurisdictions in a high speed chase before his vehicle was forced to stop after being rammed by a squad car. Many lives were endangered that day.

Environment and Costs

At the time of the implementation, the City of Janesville was enduring an economic downturn including the closing of the local General Motors plant. The city budget was looking to cut costs, not expand. Therefore, the program needed to utilize existing services both in the police department and in the community. The largest cost incurred is in manpower costs. We have elected to use on-duty patrol officers to conduct the DVI follow up. Six officers and two supervisors work on the DVI team. We assign one officer to DVI follow up as their primary assignment during day shift each day. The afternoon shift uses an “as needed” approach. The lead supervisor spends anywhere from 8 to 16 hours a week on DVI management and supervision. It would be safe to say the DVI team “costs” the department the equivalent of two full time officers. However, since the DVI team is composed of volunteers from the existing patrol staff, no new expenses were added to the city budget.



Savings can be seen in the decrease in domestic violence incidents. The police department responded to approximately 14% fewer domestic related calls in 2011 as compared to 2010. This also leaves officers available to respond to other calls for service.

Training costs have been kept at a minimum by utilizing local and grant funded training. Excellent training on stalking, strangulation and domestic violence were all provided for free through the Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance.

Risks examined with the start up of the DVI team

Would the community and domestic violence victims be welcoming of police officer follow up?

At the original meeting of the DVI officers and the YWCA, concerns were expressed as to whether a victim would want the police at her home again, especially if she was feeling embarrassment from the original contact. We address this possible issue by first attempting to make contact with the victim by phone. The

officer is then able to discuss the victim's concerns for privacy by arranging a meeting at the YWCA or alternative location where the victim feels comfortable. The victim is always given the opportunity to decline assistance.

Would the police chief continue to support the project despite the increase in officer time necessary to make the program effective?

The Chief has become a key advocate of the program and continues to support the mission of the DVI team.

Would the YWCA be able to maintain its commitment to the program due to the high turnover rate of YWCA employees?

Despite enduring a leadership change and numerous advocate changes, the YWCA continues to be available for victims. The formation of the DVI team has notably strengthened the relationship between the police department and the YWCA.

Lessons Learned

- Any department that desires to implement a DVI program should be aware of the time commitment required. Originally, our Chief thought the program would take fewer resources than we eventually learned. Between February and December 2010, our police department handled 665 domestic related incidents. 501 of those incidents required follow up by a DVI officer. Prior to making contact with the victim, we conduct a thorough background investigation to determine and document any past history of violence. Our DVI officers also attended over 125 joint meetings with victims and the YWCA advocates in 2010.
- The rewards are worth the effort. During 2011, domestic violence incidents decreased 14% from 2010. The YWCA/police department working relationship has been greatly strengthened. In November of 2011 the District Attorney expressed that due to the work of the DVI team he was going to be designating two of his prosecutors to work directly with the team and those prosecutors would handle all of the Janesville Police Department domestic violence cases, a bonus many other specialized units would envy. The District Attorney was swayed by the stability of the DVI team, and the fact the team was not reliant on grants to continue.
- Effective communication is paramount. Because police officers don't work in a physical office, we designated a cell phone for the DVI team. This allows for victims, the YWCA, and prosecutors to have direct contact with a DVI officer and/or leave a message. Because we have specific contacts, the opportunity for a victim "to fall through the cracks" has been diminished. In May 2010 we were contacted by our representative from the YWCA. She had been contacted by a woman who was in extreme fear of an ex-boyfriend. The woman said she had filed two previous harassment complaints with the police department, but "nothing had been done." The woman was so frightened that she used a false name when she answered her phone. An officer from the DVI team met with her that day and confirmed that two prior reports had been taken in March and April. Since the suspect was out of state at the time, the reports had been sent to the District Attorney's office for warrants. The warrants had not yet been issued. The DVI officer obtained information that the suspect had recently been back in



the woman's neighborhood, and that the suspect had threatened to kill the woman since "he couldn't live without her." DVI officers worked with our detective bureau and the district attorney's office; and shortly thereafter, the suspect was taken into custody on multiple stalking and harassment charges. Without our communication network, this situation might have ended much differently.

Who Championed the Innovation

Chief of Police David Moore first proposed the idea of a DVI team in the fall of 2009. Sgt. Anne Brophy volunteered to establish the team, its format, and procedures. During the past two years, the DVI team has evolved to its current structure based on input from the DVI officers, the District Attorney's office, the YWCA, and other DVI participants.

In 2011, the Janesville Police Department's DVI team proudly accepted the "Justice Award" from the Wisconsin Governor's Council on Domestic Violence. The Justice Award honors an organization or an individual for outstanding accomplishment in promoting safety, empowerment and justice for victims of domestic abuse and their children.



2011 DVI Officers: Sergeant Anne Brophy, Officer Rob Perkins II, Officer Denise Stutika, Sergeant Chad Pearson, Officer Paul McBride, Officer Amber Spade, Officer Laurie Valley, and Officer Erin Stefanik