The Schaumburg Police Department’s Domestic Violence Response Team was formed in 2003 to help end violence in the community and help individuals obtain the services they need to escape violence in the home.

Domestic violence is a serious problem with far reaching effects in communities. According to the Illinois Attorney General’s office, 31% of American women report having been physically or sexually abused by a husband or boyfriend. Approximately 240,000 pregnant women are battered each year. Domestic violence costs American businesses $5.8 billion each year: $4.1 billion in direct medical and mental health expenses, and $ 1.7 in lost productivity. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States, April 2003.) Domestic violence affects all ethnicities and socio-economic classes.

To better address this problem, an internal review of the Schaumburg Police Department’s response to domestic violence in regards to policy and procedure was completed in early 2002. The department was found to be in compliance with state law and CALEA (Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies) standards. An informal review with both the Cook County State’s Attorney’s office and several judges who preside in the domestic violence court room found Schaumburg to be above average in our response to this area. However, we felt we could do more. The police department impaneled a three member fact finding team to see what other agencies were doing and what the Schaumburg Police Department could do to excel in their level of response for victims of domestic violence.

The panel reviewed other agencies’ domestic violence policies on a local and national level. They also attended seminars hosted by the Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Many of the more progressive agencies reviewed had some form of a response team to address domestic issues, and it was determined that Schaumburg could benefit from such a program. Utilizing the material and information gained during several on site visits, a committee was formed to focus on starting such a team. The committee pooled resources form the Social Service Unit, Patrol, Administration, and Investigations.

The committee’s work led to the birth of Schaumburg’s Domestic Violence Response Team (DVRT). The Domestic Violence Team is made up of eleven patrol officers from all three shifts, three social workers, one crime analyst, three detectives, one sergeant and one lieutenant.

The goals of the team are:

* To provide effective and improved service to victims of domestic violence.
* To provide a thorough, professional investigation for the State’s Attorney’s Office.
* To have a current understanding of domestic violence, the laws that pertain to it, and to have the versatility to adjust and change with the times.
* To offer a combined, consistent departmental approach from social services, patrol, administration and investigations in an attempt to break the cycle of repeat calls and escalating violence.

The Schaumburg Police Department has taken a victim sensitive approach as it relates to domestic violence and implemented a change of policy of zero tolerance against domestic abusers. We changed our policy to state that officers **shall** make an arrest for domestic battery when probable cause exists, as opposed to the Illinois Supreme Court ruling that states an officer **may** make an arrest for domestic battery when probable cause exists. Officers sign complaints on behalf of victims when the victims are reluctant. Prior to this, if the victim did not want to pursue charges, no arrest was made. This mandatory arrest policy protects police officers against civil liability and provides immediate protection for victims, as the offender cannot bond out before appearing before a judge and cannot return home for 72 hours after bonding out.

The Domestic Violence Response Team collects information on all domestic related incidents. The crime analyst compiles data to determine when the police department has responded to three or more domestic incidents in a six month period to the same address or with the same parties. All domestic reports are reviewed by the Social Service Unit and the DVRT supervisors. The criteria for DVRT response are domestic arrests and multiple calls for service. Every domestic battery arrest is assigned to the team for follow up, as well as places or persons who have had three or more police responses. When these “Domestic Hot Spots” are identified, they are more closely monitored for intervention.

Social Services initiates a follow up call to the listed victim. During the course of the conversation, an offer is extended to have two DVRT members respond to meet with them, between 24 and 74 hours after the incident occurred. The meeting is on a voluntary basis, for the purpose of reviewing the incident and providing better follow up in several areas.

When the Domestic Violence Response Team responds, they provide the victim with answers to their questions about the arrest or the incident. The parties involved are offered counseling. The team then reviews all options available to the victim. The victim is provided this information at the time of the incident, but due to a heightened emotional state, the victim may not completely understand the information. Additionally, this is an opportunity to record by photograph any bruising that has developed and document any additional information that may have been omitted at the time of the original report. On some cases this information may be utilized to prepare for an evidence based prosecution case. The victims are apprised of their rights under existing laws. If an arrest was made, the Domestic Violence Response Team prepares victims for the rigors of criminal court proceedings. The team keeps the victim current on all court dates and is available to meet with the victim prior to and after each court date, if the victim requests. Finally, the victims are assisted in understanding the criminal process and in obtaining an Order of Protection.

The team meets quarterly to review recent assignments and to continue with training to improve overall service and officer proficiency. The team works hand in hand with the State’s Attorney’s office to bring the best prosecutable cases through the system in order to ensure the best possible dispositions. The DVRT is the department’s experts in the area of domestic violence and are able to assist other officers with questions in this area.

The DVRT team provides ongoing training to the Schaumburg Police Department employees during roll call and annual mandatory training sessions. Topics include:

* Orders of Protection (civil and criminal)
* Unlawful Visitation Interference
* Victim Sensitive Interviewing
* Teen Dating Violence
* Elder Abuse
* Abandoned Baby Law
* Crime Victim’s Compensations Program

The Domestic Violence Response Team provides public education outreach to schools, businesses and organizations to address the issues surrounding domestic violence. The Schaumburg Police Department is also a resource to other police departments in developing their own Domestic Violence Response Teams.

The team developed brochures that explain domestic violence, court proceedings, orders of protection, frequently asked questions, and available resources. These brochures are available in English, Spanish, Polish, Hindi and Urdu in attempt to reach out to immigrant victims who are hesitant to make police reports. When an officer responds to a domestic incident, he or she provides the parties involved with a brochure in the appropriate language.

In 2005, a link to the DVRT was added to the Village’s website, allowing residents to directly contact the team for information, resources, and advice.

The DVRT team has provided training to several outside police departments. We have formed partnerships with community organizations such as schools, businesses, women’s and children’s advocacy groups.

Costs associated with implementing the program were minimal. Some funds were spent on training but much training was free of charge. Costs of continuing training are minimal. There are some printing costs associated with the brochures given to victims.

Lessons Learned:

* It is important to analyze data to address locations where there are a high number of repeat calls-for-service. By applying resources to these locations, we were able to significantly reduce the number of calls-for-service to these locations.
* Training is vital in the implementation of a new program. Providing additional domestic violence training to members of a DVRT allows for DV experts to assist other officers, victims, and the community.
* Communication and cooperation among divisions is essential in providing the best victim advocacy and community partnerships.