

THE UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS PUBLIC SAFETY INSTITUTE

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COORDINATED COMMUNITY RESPONSE STRATEGIC PLAN

Dr. Amaia Iratzoqui

Department of Criminology
and Criminal Justice,
Research Director,
Public Safety Institute

Dr. Sharon Wrobel

Department of Public
and Nonprofit Administration

Dr. Sarah Leat

School of Social Work

Madeline Arriaza

Project Coordinator

Bill Gibbons

Director,
Public Safety Institute





MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Public Safety Institute (PSI) at the University of Memphis is an interdisciplinary part of the University community committed to identifying and advancing best practices in the field of public safety.

The Domestic Violence Coordinated Community Response Strategic Plan was developed with input from some 50 key stakeholders involved in addressing domestic violence. This effort would not have been possible without grant support from the Tennessee Office of Criminal Justice Programs, for which we are very grateful.

Development of this plan and its implementation is a key step in the local five-year Safe Community Action Plan.

I thank the University of Memphis interdisciplinary team composed of Drs. Amaia Iratzoqui, Sharon Wrobel, and Sarah Leat, along with Project Coordinator Madeline Arriaza, for their leadership in developing the plan. Also, I thank Domestic Violence Court Judge Greg Gilbert for his guidance and leadership.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Bill Gibbons'.

Bill Gibbons, Executive Director
Public Safety Institute

OVERVIEW

Under a grant from the Tennessee Office of Criminal Justice Programs, in 2021, the University of Memphis issued an evaluation on the effectiveness of services to domestic violence victims in Shelby County. The evaluation concluded that there is:

1. Widespread frustration among domestic violence victims, criminal justice personnel, and service providers related to the level of cooperation in providing a continuum of services to victims;
2. Challenges related to sufficient collaboration and communication;
3. Lack of funding and services available for the body of victims pursuing social services; and
4. A serious lack of 24/7 services.

As the university researchers conducted the evaluation, there was also a sense that there are many resources available or potentially available for domestic violence victims which are simply not being utilized as effectively as they could be.

At the individual case level, there was a need for a robust and comprehensive coordinated, trauma-informed approach to address the needs of victims (and hold perpetrators accountable). At a higher level, there was a need for more coordination in providing existing services coupled with a plan to address gaps in services.

What was missing was an effort to look at and address the broader picture of a sustained, coordinated approach to domestic violence so that (1) victims are aware of existing services, including services that support and empower victims to leave their abusers for good; (2) there is easy access to those services; (3) there are adequate services to meet the demand; and (4) effective steps are taken to reduce the number and percentage of offenders, especially repeat offenders.

As a follow up, in 2022 the Tennessee Office of Criminal Justice Programs awarded the Public Safety Institute at the University of Memphis \$376,000 over three years (2022-2025) to oversee a coordinated community response to domestic violence in the Memphis and Shelby County community. The research team includes Dr. Amaia Iratzoqui (Research Director of the Public Safety Institute) as Principal Investigator, and Drs. Sarah Leat (Assistant Professor, Social Work) and Sharon Wrobel (Associate Professor and Chair, Public Administration) as Investigators. A Domestic Violence Task Force was established to develop a strategic plan for addressing domestic violence and to lead implementation of the plan over the funding period. Three groups were formed to comprise the task force, consisting of:

1. A steering committee (i.e., the heads or main representatives of local law enforcement, the District Attorney's Office, the Family Safety Center, and key Shelby County justice programs),
2. A service providers group (i.e., the main domestic violence advocacy and social service agencies), and
3. A criminal justice practitioners group (i.e., representatives from law enforcement, the District Attorney's Office, and city and county government).

Domestic Violence Court Judge Greg Gilbert chaired the steering committee and gave overall direction to the effort.

Over the first year of the funded project, each group identified strategies, action items to enact these strategies, and measures and outputs for those actions to address two overall goals: 1) an increased coordinated community response to domestic violence and 2) reduced recidivism of offenders in domestic violence incidents, especially aggravated assaults involving firearms. The plan is divided into three sections reflecting the three groups comprising the task force, with strategies and action items in each section.

Over the remaining two years of the funded project, the research team will be responsible for evaluating the efficacy of the strategic plan in two stages: 1) a process evaluation (examining the task force formation, strategic plan development, and plan implementation) and 2) an impact evaluation (examining the impact of these collaborations on client outcomes).

The importance of developing and implementing a strategic plan to address domestic violence in the community is reflected by the sheer volume of reported domestic violence offenses based on data from the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI), as well as the growing number and percentage of domestic violence aggravated assaults involving firearms, as reflected by data from the Memphis Police Department (MPD).

According to preliminary TBI data, in calendar year 2022, there were 16,232 reported domestic violence offenses in all of Shelby County, with 14,158 occurring in the city of Memphis. (The rate per 100,000 population for the entire county was 1,756.5. For just the city of Memphis, the rate was 2261.7 per 100,000 population.) During the first half of 2023, countywide, there were 8,314 reported domestic violence offenses, with 7,346 being reported in Memphis. (For the first half of the year, the rate per 100,000 in the entire county was 908.3, and 1,187.6 in Memphis.)¹

These figures reflect only those domestic violence offenses reported to law enforcement, with many offenses going unreported.

Possibly even more disturbing, based on data from the MPD, in the city of Memphis last year, 55.8 percent of reported domestic violence aggravated assaults involved firearms compared to less than 25 percent in 2011. For the first half of this year, 52 percent of reported domestic violence aggravated assaults involved firearms. Guns have become the weapon of choice in domestic violence aggravated assault cases.

Creation of the task force to oversee development of the strategic plan and its implementation is a key step in the local five-year (2022-2026) Safe Community Action Plan.

¹ The TBI has defined domestic violence offenses as those flagged by law enforcement as domestically related and have the individual victim type identified. The TBI counts the number of victims involved in an incident, not just the number of incidents. Domestic violence offenses include murder and non-negligent manslaughter, kidnapping/abduction, forcible rape, forcible sodomy, sexual assault with an object, forcible fondling, incest, statutory rape, aggravated assault, simple assault, intimidation, and stalking.

Service Providers

Strategy 1: Distribute 1,000 Ring camera to domestic violence survivors in Shelby County.

Context: The service providers identified in their early meetings the necessity to source and distribute Ring cameras to victims at their housing placement as a means to increase their sense of security. Drawing off a prior project operationalized in Nashville, several of the service provider team members coordinated with Amazon to generate funding for up to sixty cameras per agency (nonprofit agencies only) at a time and then distribute to their clients. While the Ring camera requires initial setup, its primary advantage is that it can be transferred to a new location and stay with the client and the client's family.

Action 1 (Status: *complete*): Establish protocol for ordering Ring cameras.

This item will be measured through a written document describing the procedures for ordering and receiving Ring cameras.

Action 2 (Status: *in progress*): Identify initial groups interested in cameras.

This item is measured by generating a list of and contacts for interested groups.

Action 3 (Status: *in progress*): Create safety plans. The project coordinator worked with a representative from Hope House to generate safety plan printouts to accompany the Ring cameras distributed to agency clients. Individual and family safety plans were adapted from existing protocol used by Hope House and the Nashville YWCA.

This item is demonstrated through the safety protocol document adapted from existing protocols.

Action 4 (Status: *pending*): Create flyers/social media content about Ring cameras for distribution at events.

This item will be measured through the flyer created and further measured by the number of copies printed.

Action 5 (Status: *pending*): Distribute flyers/social media content about Ring cameras for distribution at events.

This item will be measured through the number and mode of distribution of social media content.

Action 6 (Status: *pending*): Establish educational Zoom meetings for agencies. Zoom meetings will cover ordering and use of cameras for local nonprofits.

This item will be measured though Zoom recording(s) and attendance log(s).

Strategy 2: Coordinate applications for the Domestic Violence Bonus Money.

Context: The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) offers a pool of additional funding each grant year for services related to domestic violence response. The primary needs for domestic violence service agencies in Shelby County relate to housing capacity. As the local Continuum of Care designee for HUD, the Community Alliance for the Homeless has offered information sessions and technical assistance to interested agencies in putting together an application separately or as a coordinated effort.

Action 1 (Status: *complete*): Conduct information sessions from Community Alliance for the Homeless.

This item is demonstrated through session announcements, content, and attendance logs.

Action 2 (Status: *pending*): Post and distribute application information.

Posting is demonstrated through the document, locations, and dates posted, while the application is demonstrated through the dates of/number of emails sent, locations, and number of handouts distributed.

Action 3 (Status: *pending*): Share the application information with agencies.

This item will be measured through the meeting attendance logs.

Action 4 (Status: *pending*): Agencies meet to coordinate their applications together.

This item will be measured through the number of completed applications. Additionally, a post survey will be collected to understand the agencies' experience with the coordination and application process.

Action 5 (Status: *pending*): Meet for final application submission.

This item will be measured through meeting attendance and the number of applications submitted.

Strategy 3: Identify flexible funding for shelter and housing repairs.

Context: Flexible funding is needed to maintain property (e.g., adding security measures if a resident reports break-in, damage). Additionally, this funding gives landlords a tangible benefit and security, with minimal risk.

Action 1 (Status: *complete*): Identify damage funding for those fleeing domestic violence, with special emphasis on 18-24 year-olds.

This item was demonstrated through the number of organizations notified of available funding, the number of requests for damage funding, and the number and amounts of funding received.

Action 2 (Status: *pending*): Identify additional sources of funding.

This item will be measured through a listing of identified funding sources and grant criteria.

Action 3 (Status: *pending*): Seek funding from members of the Shelby County Board of Commissioners as well as other potential funding sources.
This item will be measured through names, contact dates, and meeting outcomes.

Practitioners

Strategy 1: Improve interdepartmental communication, centered around the ongoing Domestic Violence Rapid Response Team (DVRRT).

Context: Practitioners highlighted the necessity for collaboration with service providers in order to quickly make referrals and guide clients to services. One goal for reform in this area should be to smooth the tension between the District Attorney's Office, Family Safety Center, and law enforcement to ensure that justice is being served for domestic violence survivors.

Action 1 (Status: *complete*): Structure DVRRT to connect high-risk survivors to services and build strong cases against perpetrators.
This item is demonstrated through the meetings held and the number and nature of high-risk survivors' service contacts.

Action 2 (Status: *complete*): Develop a preparation protocol for DVRRT meetings.
This item is demonstrated through protocol documents and implementation date.

Action 3 (Status: *ongoing*): Consistently meet at least twice a month.
This item will be measured through meeting schedules and/or minutes.

Action 4 (Status: *ongoing*): Consistently focus on high-risk survivors in the DVRRT meetings.
This item will be measured through meeting schedules and/or minutes.

Action 5 (Status: *ongoing*): Hire a DVRRT coordinator.
This is demonstrated through the hire and start date of the DVRRT coordinator.

Strategy 2: Develop and administer a survey to local law enforcement officers identifying barriers connecting victims to services offered by the Family Safety Center (FSC).

Context: There was a need to document the engagement of law enforcement and domestic violence victims and survivors with the FSC. The survey encompassed the barriers law enforcement could face in connecting victims to FSC services, including contact with calls to FSC's dual LAP and emergency hotline.

Action 1 (Status: *complete*): Create, implement, and analyze the officer survey.

This item is demonstrated through the survey questionnaire, response rate, and results.

Action 2 (Status: *complete*): Share results of the officer survey.

This item is demonstrated through presentation minutes and survey results documentation.

Strategy 3: Target at-risk populations with domestic violence awareness education initiatives.

Context: The pre-teen and teen years are an important time to begin learning the foundations of healthy relationships. Research shows that, before domestic or dating violence occurs, there is often bullying and aggression in childhood. The need for youth education on healthy relationships was highlighted by the task force. There have been previous domestic violence awareness efforts within schools in Shelby County, but long-standing, consistent, and evidence-based interventions have been lacking.

Action 1 (Status: *pending*): Identify middle schools in target areas. Specifically target zip codes that have elevated rates of domestic violence within the county as defined by domestic violence calls to law enforcement agencies (LEAs). This item is demonstrated through a list of identified middle schools and rates of domestic violence from LEAs.

Action 2 (Status: *pending*): Meet with school administrators to finalize programming. This item is demonstrated through the school administrator names and date of contact.

Action 3 (Status: *pending*): Enroll youth in evidence-based social and emotional educational programming. This item will be measured through program description documentation and the number of youth enrolled in each.

Action 4 (Status: *pending*): Recruit/train volunteers for youth group educational sessions (an example mentioned by law enforcement being Purple Circle Talks). This item is demonstrated through recruitment plans, training dates and materials, training attendance, and a roster of volunteers.

Action 5 (Status: *pending*): Coordinate with school administrators to meet volunteer requirements. This item is demonstrated through documentation of program improvements/changes.

Action 6 (Status: *pending*): Determine interest and participation in community-based domestic violence education classes. This item will be measured through the program attendance rosters.

Action 7 (Status: *pending*): Assist with programming and marketing for community-based domestic violence education classes. This item will be measured through marketing documentation, program materials, and attendance rosters/counts.

Steering Committee

Strategy 1: Streamline the process to distribute the Lethality Assessment Protocol (LAP) to entities centered around bail and other court decisions through the implementation of an electronic Lethality Assessment Protocol (LAP 2.0).

Context: There are two goals of the LAP. One is to use the score to determine potential risk to victims and connect survivors to support and safety planning services. The second is to communicate LAP information to court personnel so that bail and other appropriate court decisions can be made accordingly. In Shelby County, the judicial commissioners and judges are not consistently using the LAP in court decisions. The LAP form is a good source of information regarding the severity of the case and the risk of the case becoming a homicide.

Action 1 (Status: *complete*): Map the current flow of LAPs. This item is demonstrated through a dated copy of the LAP flow map and presentation minutes.

Action 2 (Status: *pending*): The Memphis Police Department, District Attorney's Office, Shelby County Sheriff's Office, Family Safety Center, and suburban LEAs are to use LAP 2.0. This item will be measured through the implementation date for each agency.

Action 3 (Status: *pending*): Complete training with law enforcement officers, judges, judicial commissioners, and 24-hour clerks.
This item is demonstrated through the training schedule and the number and title of individuals completing the training.

Strategy 2: Explore the viability of a 24/7 response within domestic violence services.

Context: The level of demand for client advocacy is much higher than the capacity of the four advocates that are housed at the Family Safety Center (FSC). Additionally, the connection to emergency housing is well above the current capacity. This strategy will focus on the ability of one or more agencies to provide an uninterrupted stream of services for law enforcement and clients calling directly for access to and contact with social service providers.

Action 1 (Status: *complete*): Share the FSC data on LAP calls.
This item is demonstrated through presentation minutes and call logs.

Action 2 (Status: *pending*): Work to expand the YWCA shelter capacity in number of beds and expanded property.
This item will be measured through bed-counts and property descriptions.

Action 3 (Status: *pending*): Assess the capacity of domestic violence social service agencies to house 24/7 advocates for domestic violence victims.
This item will be measured through capacity assessment reports.

Action 4 (Status: *pending*): Align the FSC structure to the family justice center best practices.
This item will be measured with focus groups and individual interviews as part of the process evaluation.

Summary

Some 50 stakeholders participated in the task force created to develop this strategic plan. As part of the implementation process, key stakeholders will need to be recruited to assume the lead in implementation of each of the eight strategies, including recruitment of a team to assume responsibility for each action under each strategy. The university will spearhead recruitment through the beginning of the project's second funding year. The university will also begin the evaluation stage of the project with a process evaluation to examine plan development and implementation. An impact evaluation will be conducted through the final year of funding.



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