

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: GETTING INVOLVED

A Proposal to Institute

A Domestic Violence

Task Force in Kosciusko County

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Kosciusko Leadership Academy

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Domestic violence has occurred in our community for many years. The difference today from years past is that now domestic violence is against the law. Domestic violence is defined as one person in an intimate or family relationship physically, sexually, and/or psychologically assaulting the other person in that relationship. The alarming statistics below reveal that domestic violence is widespread.

- * Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women; more significant than auto accidents, rapes, and muggings combined.
- *The single most common reason women go to the emergency room is domestic violence.
- *One-third of battered women are pregnant.
- *The FBI estimates that only one in ten domestic violence assaults result in police notification.
- *Every 15 seconds in the United States a woman is beaten.
- *Domestic violence costs the nation between \$5 and \$10 billion per year in medical costs.
- *In homes where spousal abuse exists, there is a 70% chance that child abuse is occurring.
- *Businesses lose an estimated \$100 million to \$300 million per year nationally due to domestic violence, which is manifested by absenteeism, sick leave, and loss of productivity.
- *Weapons are used in one-third of domestic violence incidents.
- * Up to one-third of America's homeless population are women and children fleeing abuse.
- *Approximately 25% of all murders in the U.S. occur within the family. Half of these are husbands killing their wives.
- *Women who leave their abusers are at a 75% greater risk of being killed by their abusers than those who stay.

Domestic Violence Is A Crime

Domestic violence is a crime, and our community must make the commitment to put an

end to the violence that plagues our homes. Whether we live in one of these homes or not, we are all affected. These victims are our friends, neighbors, co-workers, and relatives. They are involved in our churches, schools, and everyday aspects of our lives. Through education, cooperation, and a willingness to get involved, we can make a difference. One way to get involved is the creation of a domestic violence task force. This Kosciusko Leadership Academy white paper provides the groundwork to do so. Additionally, the members of this group prepared a public service announcement, produced by Video and Sound Productions, which will be aired on the local cable television channel, VSP-TV, courtesy of a donation by Video and Sound Productions.

Current Programs and Procedures

The courts, social services and agencies of Kosciusko County are already aware of the serious domestic violence problem in our community. Several entities already have programs in place to deal with domestic violence. The Warsaw Police Department currently has a victims assistance program in place. Becky Moreno acts as a full-time Victim's Assistance Coordinator and helps victims obtain the services they need, such as counseling, shelter, and moral support. The Kosciusko County Prosecutor's Office also has a victims assistance program in place which dedicates a majority of its efforts to domestic violence cases. Lisa Eckert, the victims' advocate, helps victims throughout the entire prosecution of the aggressor, including preparing the victim to testify at trial. Also, the Kosciusko County courts regularly refer aggressors who plead guilty to battery to counseling and anger management programs.

The Kosciusko County Division of Family and Children (DFC) conducts investigations into reported incidents of domestic violence, accepting reports from private citizens, doctors, teachers, and counselors. The DFC uses state funds to provide counseling and make service

referrals for victims of abuse. However, these services can only be provided when abuse or injury is substantiated, and it focuses primarily on abuse to children.

The Beaman Home is a shelter for victims of domestic violence, which can accommodate women and their children for extended periods of time. The Bowen Center provides women's issues support groups and individual therapy for victims of domestic violence and also provides anger management support groups and individual therapy for men and women.

The Kosciusko County Probation Department monitors aggressors on probation and assures that those ordered to counseling as part of probation complete their programs. Also the probation officers make recommendations to the courts about appropriate sentences in felony battery cases.

Various entities in the county such as schools, the hospital, counseling providers, doctors offices, and others regularly report domestic violence victims they interact with to law enforcement agencies and the Division of Family and Children. *The Warsaw Times-Union* has printed effective stories about domestic violence which publicize local problems.

Needed Improvements

Such a full list of agencies willing to help seems encouraging. However, several individuals working for the various agencies above voiced concerns about the status quo and made suggestions they would like to see implemented. The suggestions listed below are those which were made by more than one person interviewed and represent more than one agency:

*Increased training for law enforcement officers, including conducting on-site investigations, case-building techniques for when victims are uncooperative, and consistent responses to domestic violence calls.

*Increased funding to provide services for victims and aggressors.

- *Increased publicity of domestic violence to create greater public awareness.
- *Mandatory arrests by law enforcement officers when responding to domestic violence calls.
- *Greater cooperation and communication between agencies to eliminate duplication of services.
- *More assistance for victims including education and counseling for victims to interrupt the abuse cycle.
- *Less politics and more action!

Task Force Needed for Coordination

Creation of a domestic violence task force will provide an opportunity for social services, law enforcement agencies, and the courts to work together to address current domestic violence issues, and initiate and implement new ideas which will improve Kosciusko County's domestic violence response network.

The primary goal of a task force is to develop a comprehensive plan in dealing with domestic violence in our community. Utilizing the input from various agencies is vital in achieving this goal. The task force will espouse the following values:

1. The fundamental aspect of this plan will be to ensure the safety of the victim and the children.
2. This system will not blame the victim. Victims will be given nonjudgmental support, information about the resources and options available to them, and an open door to return and seek more help when needed.
3. The abusers will be held accountable for their actions and provided with options and long-term support for change.
4. This system will be coordinated in such a way that individualized assessment of needs can be performed.

5. Bilingual resources will be available as necessary.

The following agencies will be invited to join the task force:

1. Kosciusko County Police agencies
2. Kosciusko County Jail
3. Probation Department
4. Prosecutor's Office
5. The Court
6. The Bowen Center
7. The Beaman Home.
8. Kosciusko Community Hospital Emergency Room
9. Kosciusko County Welfare Department
10. Media
11. Ministerial Association
12. Chamber of Commerce
13. Any concerned citizens, businesses, and agencies

Goals of the Task Force

*Increase public awareness which will be accomplished through the media and presentations.

*Increased training whereby each agency must receive specific training in domestic violence so they are able to adequately deal with each domestic violence situation.

*Consistent responses are needed since although each case of domestic violence involves a variety of different needs, the basic issues remain the same; therefore, it would be beneficial to utilize a "standard" response procedure in each agency.

*Promote cooperation since it is absolutely necessary for each agency to be willing and able to

work together and communicate regularly in order for benefits from this system to be maximized.

Formation of the Task Force

Each agency listed above will be invited in writing to attend a meeting on Thursday, June 5, 1997 at 7:00 A.M. in the Council Chamber at Warsaw City Hall. The initial meeting will focus on the following:

- *Interest in Task Force membership and organization.
- *Discussion of potential task force activities.

The following are suggested topics of discussion for task force actions:

- *Implementation of a uniform investigative and arrest procedure for all domestic violence cases.
- *Strategies for making safety information available to possible victims.
- *Automatic 72-hour "No Contact Order" upon arrest for domestic violence.
- *Domestic violence screening at medical facilities.
- *Support groups for victims and children.
- *Strategies for public awareness/education
- *Prevention ideas
- *Domestic violence program implementation in the workplace.

Becky Moreno and Lisa Eckert have written a grant requesting start-up funds for the task force. After the task force is organized, members will convene formally once every quarter. These meetings will address the following issues: assessing current procedures, assessing needs, developing action plans, applying revisions as necessary, and tracking the progress of the task

force.

The domestic violence task force will only be successful if agencies and individuals in the community are committed to its success. Although domestic violence will always be with us, if the community provides resources to help combat domestic violence, and the community is aware of those resources and making use of them, the effects of domestic violence in our community can be minimized.

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