

West Valley Children's Domestic Violence Resources Gaps Analysis

Background

The West Valley Children's Domestic Violence Resource group is a collaborative effort to intensify assessment of available domestic violence (DV) prevention, resources, and services available in the West Valley. Under the direction of the West Valley Human Services Alliance and its Health, Wellness and Safety Subcommittee, and facilitated by the staff of the Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG), this effort engaged the entire West Valley in a community planning effort to identify resource gaps and recommend comprehensive solutions.

The West Valley Children's Domestic Violence Resource study is the culmination of networking, collaboration, and capacity building in the West Valley. This effort utilized a Community Planning Model to assess regional DV and child welfare services, and plan for systemic changes to make a long-term impact on the community. This effort was designed to bring in community members, families, and organizations from throughout the West Valley, in order to perform a comprehensive assessment of available local services and identify any gaps in services and resources.

Data Collection Methods

The MAG staff and leadership of the West Valley Human Services Alliance Health, Wellness and Safety Subcommittee took every step to ensure diverse representation from agencies throughout the West Valley. Beginning with the West Valley Human Services Alliance itself, invitations for participation were extended through various email distribution lists, newsletters, website postings and at other MAG and West Valley meetings. With each of the data collection methods detailed below, open invitations for participation and response were extended, and diverse representation was actively pursued.

West Valley Human Services Alliance Children's Services Survey

Between November 2005 and January 2006, the West Valley Human Services Alliance Children's Services Survey was administered to social service, law enforcement, health care, community referral, school districts, municipalities and other agencies across the West Valley. Responses to the survey were received from 32 different individuals representing 26 organizations. Questions on the survey are attached as **Exhibit A**.

West Valley Children's Domestic Violence Resource Participant Response

On March 13, 2006, MAG convened the first working group of West Valley agencies to discuss the ongoing survey process, existing West Valley resources for children who witness DV, and the community's needs for children's DV services. Participants were asked to respond to three questions, which are attached as **Exhibit B**.

MAG staff received 16 responses to these questions, representing 16 different agencies. Additionally, the comments and feedback from each of the 30 individuals in attendance at the Children's DV Resource meeting were taken into account when tabulating the anecdotal data and generating the Gaps Analysis.

West Valley Human Services Alliance Health, Wellness and Safety Subcommittee Response

On March 27, 2006, members of the West Valley Human Services Alliance Health, Wellness and Safety Subcommittee were asked to respond to the same three questions as above. Sixteen West Valley agencies were represented at the meeting who had not participated in the Children's DV Resource meeting on March 13, 2006. Their responses were also taken into account when tabulating data and generating the Gaps Analysis.

Findings

West Valley agencies report varying numbers of experiences with children who witness DV, but almost all agencies agree this is a serious problem and that West Valley children who witness DV face a grave shortage of appropriate services.

Incidence of Children Who Witness DV

Studies estimate that 10 to 20 percent of children are at risk for exposure to domestic violence¹. These findings translate into approximately 3.3 to 10 million children who witness the abuse of a parent or adult caregiver each year².

On a regional level, the West Valley includes approximately 696,398 residents³. Applying Maricopa County's percentage of children ages 0-19 to total regional population (31.7%⁴), there are approximately 220,758 children residing in the West Valley. If, following the national models, 10 to 20 percent of these children are at risk for exposure to domestic violence, this translates into between 22,075 and 44,151 West Valley children witnessing domestic violence every year. Clearly, this is a sizable population with very special and sensitive needs that must be addressed by their providers and their community.

While some West Valley agencies do not come in direct contact with any of these children who witness DV, others, such as police departments, come in contact with 400-700 such children each year at their agency. Other agencies also report a high incidence of children who witness DV. Arizona Baptist Children's Services, a subcontractor to Arizona Child Protective Services, reports that they come in contact with 750 West Valley children annually who witness DV. (**See attached Exhibit C** for full survey responses.) Other providers, such as the Sun City West Fire Department, report they do not currently come in contact with any children who witness DV, as their's is currently an age-restricted community. However, as the character of certain West Valley communities continue to transition from retirement to family living, several municipalities are likely going to see an increase in needed services for children.

The total number of children who witness DV and came in contact with the agencies responding to the aforementioned survey total 3,636. By any estimation, the number of West Valley children

¹ Carlson, B. E. (2000). Children exposed to intimate partner violence: Research findings and implications for intervention. *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse*, 1(4), pp. 321 to 340.

² Carlson, Bonnie E. (1984). Children's observations of interpersonal violence. Pp. 147-167 in A.R. Roberts (Ed.) *Battered women and their families* (pp. 147-167). NY: Springer. Straus, M.A. (1992). Children as witnesses to marital violence: A risk factor for lifelong problems among a nationally representative sample of American men and women. *Report of the Twenty-Third Ross Roundtable*. Columbus, OH: Ross Laboratories.

³ Arizona Department of Economic Security, July 2005.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, Special Census 2004.

seeking and/or receiving services for witnessing DV is far below the 22,075 and 44,151 estimated West Valley children who actually witness DV annually.

Services Available in West Valley

The self-reporting and interagency communication demonstrates that a wide array of services is available for West Valley children who witness DV. While some agencies do not provide direct service to children who witness DV, most provide some related ancillary services that provide a secondary support network. (See **attached Exhibit D** for full meeting participant responses.) For instance:

- ◆ Six Boys and Girls Clubs in the West Valley, providing after school and recreational programs.
- ◆ Six ValueOptions direct service clinics in the West Valley, providing case management, substance abuse treatment, and assistance with housing and offender services. ValueOptions is also pioneering “Kids System”, a family-centered, community-supported, strengths-based treatment for children to get the support they need.
- ◆ Nuestra Familia offers counseling, legal assistance, safety planning, mental health, child welfare, substance abuse and health education.
- ◆ There are four West Valley domestic violence shelters, including Faith House in Glendale, New Life Center and Trudy’s Place in Goodyear, and Eve’s Place in Surprise. Additionally, DeColores DV Shelter is in Phoenix, but may provide some services to West Valley residents.
- ◆ The West Valley Advocacy Center provides forensic interviewing, advocacy, short-term and group counseling.
- ◆ Glendale Police Department has detectives trained in forensic interviews for children.
- ◆ The Phoenix PATCHS program offers intake with bilingual Child Specialists for children across the metro Phoenix area, as well as physical, behavioral and developmental health screenings for children.

Services Lacking in West Valley

The specific services lacking for children in the West Valley who witness DV may be identified in part by looking at the services for which West Valley agencies routinely refer such clients out of the West Valley. For instance, several West Valley agencies report they refer clients to service providers outside of the West Valley for drug counseling, mental health services, or disabled-accessibility resources.

Other West Valley agencies identified specific services lacking in the region, including:

- A Family Advocacy Center serving the Southwest Valley.
- Additional provider training, including cultural competency.
- A program similar to PATCHS.
- Additional school, church and community center intervention and prevention, including dating violence.
- Sliding fee psychological evaluations.
- Anger management and other support groups for various age groups of children and teens, including bilingual groups.
- Programs for undocumented families who do not qualify for AHCCCS.
- Counseling, including free or reduced services, as well as weekend coverage.
- Youth creative arts program.
- Mentorship programs for children.
- Additional child psychiatry services.
- Transportation, specifically to and from Boys and Girls Clubs, Boy and Girl Scouts, YMCAs, and other recreational opportunities.
- Additional school counselors and/or social workers.
- Additional shelter beds
- A program similar to Fresh Start.

Pending Service Changes/Additions

Some West Valley providers indicated they are expanding or changing the nature of their services. For instance, the West Valley Child Crisis Center's capacity fluctuates to meet client need, as there are no similar services available for this age group in the West Valley. They have the capacity to serve up to 58 children, but typically have 40-48 children in their care. With the reserve capacity, the West Valley Child Crisis Center is planning to offer respite care for families beginning in Fall 2006. This appears to be a service in high demand for the West Valley.

Likewise, a new domestic violence safe-home opened in Surprise in March 2006. Eve's Place adds its capacity to shelter eight to ten individuals to the shelter mix in the West Valley. As this facility was so new at the time of this assessment, Eve's Place had not yet worked with children who witnessed DV.

Barriers to Obtaining Services

One of the main barriers to obtaining services is the lack of communication or coordination among West Valley agencies. As the community continues to expand rapidly, new services providers and new services at existing provider sites are launched, but it is difficult to get the word out in a region without an established communication network.

Of note, though, is one byproduct of this study – the West Valley Children and DV Resource List (attached as **Exhibit E**.) This list was created from the input of survey respondents and meeting participants, as well as extensive research. The Resource List provides West Valley children's DV resources categorized by municipality and cross-referenced by service category. Each listing includes the agency name and contact information, as well as services provided. The document also includes a small number of resources outside the West Valley that are specifically designed for children who have witnessed DV and that are available to children from all areas of the Valley. Draft versions of the Resource List were shared with various West Valley committees and working groups, and the document is now being finalized and formatted for

distribution. Dissemination of the Resource List will address, in part, the West Valley communication issue. Other communication barriers are beginning to be addressed by the West Valley Human Services Alliance and other such efforts, but more remains to be done, such as:

Other barriers are common to any locale, regardless of region. For instance, many West Valley providers cite the lack of child psychiatrists, but this is a nationwide problem that will likely persist for many years. The only recommended action to surmount this barrier is:

Of course, lack of funding for certain services remains an issue. While many providers cited the need for additional school counselors and domestic violence shelter beds, this ultimately is contingent upon the availability of funding really boils down to a lack of funding available for these services. To address the regional lack of funding for children's DV services, the following steps are recommended:

Summary

In conclusion, it is important to note that anecdotal evidence suggests one of the best strengths for children who witness DV in the West Valley is leadership. The passionate participation in the study's efforts by several West Valley elected officials, service providers, and agency staff demonstrate the leadership and commitment of these individuals to the cause of providing ideal services for children who witness DV. These leaders volunteered to spearhead several of the Human Service Alliance subcommittees, and should be relied upon for future mobilization and planning efforts. While the region may be lacking in some service areas, it is certainly fortunate to have the strength and experience of key leaders to rely upon for improving service provision.

The momentum for creating lasting, effective change in West Valley children's DV services is strong. The West Valley should take advantage of the leadership and energy by quickly establishing any committees or groups, and reaching out to elected officials, service providers, and business community members. These groups may begin their efforts by focusing on the gaps identified throughout this process, as well as on the recommendations yielded by West Valley representatives.

Exhibit A

West Valley Human Services Alliance Children's Services Survey Questions

1. In any given year, approximately how many children does your agency come in contact with who have been exposed to domestic violence (DV)?
2. What services does your agency provide to children who witness or experience DV?
3. What services for children who witness or experience DV are available elsewhere *in the West Valley*?
4. What services are lacking *in the West Valley* for children who witness or experience DV?
5. For what services does your agency refer children to other West Valley agencies? For what services do you refer children to other agencies outside the West Valley?
6. If you provide referrals to children in DV situations, what agency/individual is your primary referral? Please describe the relationship.
7. Where do you go for additional information, education, or referral information on children who witness or experience DV?

West Valley Children's Domestic Violence Resource Participant Questions

1. What services, if any, does your agency provide to children who have witnessed domestic violence?
2. From whom do you receive referrals, and to whom do you refer?
3. What services do you wish were available in the West Valley for children who have witnessed domestic violence?