

2015 Achievement Awards Virginia Association of Counties

APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2015.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

Locality: Loudoun County

Program Title: Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Violence

Program Category: Criminal Justice and Public Safety

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: Tim Hemstreet

Title: County Administrator

Signature: 

2015 VACO ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS NOMINATION APPLICATION

Nominee: Loudoun Domestic Abuse Response Team

Program Title: A Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Violence

Program Category: Criminal Justice and Public Safety

BRIEF SUMMARY

The Coordinated Community Response (CCR) model of domestic violence illustrates the inter-relationship of agencies and levels of response for addressing domestic violence. It recognizes that no one agency can deal effectively and safely with the effects of domestic violence, but rather a collaborative approach is best.

Loudoun County has developed a coordinated community response (CCR) to domestic violence through the collaborative efforts of its project partners. The project partners include the Loudoun Abused Women's Shelter, Loudoun County Sheriff's Office, Leesburg Police Department, Commonwealth's Attorneys' Office, Victim-Witness Program, the Loudoun County Department of Community Corrections, Loudoun County Juvenile Court Services Unit, Loudoun County Department of Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Developmental Services, Loudoun County Department of Family Services, Loudoun County Public Schools, Virginia Department of Corrections – 25th District Probation and Parole, Northern Virginia Legal Services, and several Batterer's Intervention Program providers.

Loudoun Domestic Abuse Response Team

To facilitate development of its CCR, the county formed the Loudoun Domestic Abuse Response Team (D.A.R.T.). D.A.R.T. is comprised of front line workers and mid-level managers from the project agencies. The D.A.R.T. is advised by the Loudoun Domestic Violence Steering Committee, which consists of county agency directors, local elected officials as well as the Juvenile & Domestic Relations Court Judges.

The Loudoun D.A.R.T. endeavors to ensure collaboration with project and community partners regarding information sharing, mutual problem solving, victim safety issues, offender accountability as well as accountability within the criminal justice system. The team has developed protocols that ensure clear and expeditious lines of communication within the justice system as well as encourage the legal exchange of critical information that should lead to uniform and consistent responses to domestic and family violence.

D.A.R.T. Mission Statement

The mission of the D.A.R.T. is to ensure the safety of victims and families, and to increase offender accountability through consistent collaboration with our interagency and community partners; and to promote awareness and education about the pervasive effects of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse through training, intervention, and rehabilitation.

2015 VACO ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS NOMINATION APPLICATION

Nominee: Loudoun Domestic Abuse Response Team

Program Title: A Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Violence

Program Category: Criminal Justice and Public Safety

BACKGROUND

In 2004, staff of Loudoun County Administration met with local decision-makers to discuss the topic of domestic violence in the community, and to apply for federal grant funding to address the issue. Later that year, Loudoun County was awarded \$500,000 in federal grant funding (*Grants To Encourage Arrest Policies and the Enforcement of Protection Orders*) to implement a "coordinated community response" to domestic violence. "Coordinated community response" is a nationally recognized concept. However, each locality is challenged to tailor any coordinated response to its particular community. Due to the success of Loudoun County's domestic violence project efforts, the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors agreed to fully fund all of the domestic violence positions associated with the county's Domestic Violence Project at the conclusion of the federal grant funding in 2010.

THE PROBLEM

As evidenced by recent stories in the media, the subject of domestic violence is gaining increased attention nationally as an issue that negatively affects the health, safety and well-being of families and communities. One domestic violence case can involve several levels of government, and many different agencies and service providers. Although many practitioners might touch the same cases, many do not communicate with each other, and the lack of

communication can impact victim safety. An effective response requires consistent coordination.

Loudoun County recognized the need to create an infrastructure that fostered collaboration.

THE SOLUTION

Loudoun County created a coordinated community response to domestic violence by taking the following steps:

***Developed an infrastructure to ensure interagency collaboration**

The project partners of Loudoun's Domestic Violence Project include the Loudoun County Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court Judges, Loudoun County's Commonwealth's Attorney's Office, Loudoun County Victim-Witness Program, Loudoun County Juvenile Court Services Unit, Loudoun County Department of Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Developmental Services (Community Services Board), Loudoun County Department of Family Services, Leesburg Police Dept, Loudoun County Sheriff's Office, Loudoun County Public Schools, Loudoun County Department of Community Corrections, Virginia Department of Corrections – 25th District State Probation & Parole, Loudoun Citizens for Social Justice/Loudoun Abused Women's Shelter (LAWS), Northern Virginia Legal Services, several Batterer's Intervention Program service providers, and county administration staff.

To promote efficiency and effectiveness, the domestic violence project has the following organizational structure—the Domestic Violence Steering Committee, comprised of agency directors, department heads, local Judges, the Commonwealth's Attorney, an Assistant County Administrator and other county staff, advises the Loudoun Domestic Abuse Response Team. The Domestic Violence Steering Committee is chaired by the Assistant County Administrator. The

Loudoun Domestic Abuse Response Team (hereinafter referred to as Loudoun D.A.R.T.) is a multi-disciplinary team of front-line service providers and middle managers who work directly with domestic violence victims, offenders and their children. The Coordinator/Project Manager of the Loudoun D.A.R.T. leads the team and serves as liaison between Loudoun D.A.R.T. and the Domestic Violence Steering Committee.

Loudoun D.A.R.T. meets monthly to staff cases, to discuss any systemic gaps or challenges in the criminal justice system response or service provision, and to discuss recommendations for changes to local policies and procedures. Loudoun D.A.R.T. also creates a written draft of any recommended policy and procedural changes for presentation to the Domestic Violence Steering Committee. The Domestic Violence (DV) Steering Committee meets once per quarter to discuss and review any recommendations for developing new programs or enhancing current local policy or procedures from the Loudoun D.A.R.T. At these meetings, the Project Manager of the Loudoun D.A.R.T. also apprises the DV Steering Committee about the team's domestic violence project efforts (trainings provided, goals accomplished, workload and case number updates, etc.). Finally, in addition to the aforementioned meetings, the Loudoun D.A.R.T. meets once per quarter with the Loudoun County Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court Judges. The purpose of these meetings is to discuss ideas for improving the judicial process.

***Conducted a countywide safety audit of eight county agencies and the local non-profit domestic violence & sexual assault service provider in 2006**

Shortly after the project was established, the participating partners decided to conduct a safety and accountability audit of the agencies/organizations that handle domestic violence cases. The Loudoun County Safety and Accountability audit consisted of six steps: (1) attending

a two day audit training facilitated by Praxis International; (2) forming an inter-agency audit team; (3) determining the scope of the audit and selecting the audit question; (4) collecting data through interviews, observations, focus groups, and text analysis; (5) analyzing the data; and (6) preparing findings and recommendations.

A trained ten member team conducted the audit over a six month period. The team audited eight county agencies and one local non-profit organization that assists victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking. Audit team members completed twenty-eight (28) interviews and observations, five (5) focus groups, and some text analysis of actual documents and forms used by the agencies. The team also held four (4) debriefing sessions (2-3 hours each in length) to analyze the collected data. The entire audit process spanned approximately 100 hours. Information from the audit was used by the project partners to enhance their systems and to improve their policies and procedures related to domestic violence incident response.

***Created specialized positions to enhance response to domestic violence cases**

Although interdisciplinary collaboration is becoming a common way to address social problems, the creation of specialized positions ensure that professionals are adequately trained to respond to the complex issue of domestic violence. With the use of federal grant funding, Loudoun County initially created four specialized positions at various county agencies. Those positions were:

1) Domestic Violence Coordinator (Sergeant) at the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office

The DV Sergeant conducts follow up interviews with domestic violence victims on arrest cases in Loudoun County, and then meets with the Domestic Violence ACA to assist with prosecuting the

criminal case. The Sergeant is also responsible for training the DV squad coordinators on various DV topics and for notifying them of any changes to policies and procedures to ensure that the information is given to the patrol deputies.

2) Family Abuse Officer at the Loudoun County Juvenile Court Services Unit

The Family Abuse Officer assists victims with obtaining protection orders, and monitors all preliminary and permanent protection orders that are issued by the Loudoun Juvenile & Domestic Relations District Court

3) Domestic Violence Probation Officer at Loudoun County Dept of Community Corrections

The DV Probation Officer(s) monitor a caseload of dv offenders who are placed on supervised probation by the Court.

4) Loudoun Domestic Abuse Response Team Coordinator/Project Manager

The D.A.R.T. Coordinator manages the countywide project by leading the team, ensuring the completion of project goals, coordinating the provision of training and services among agencies, and serving as a liaison between the D.A.R.T. and the Domestic Violence Steering Committee.

In addition to these specialized positions, many project partners have assigned staff to work specifically with DV cases. For example, the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office assigns certain Assistant Commonwealth's Attorneys to prosecute all domestic assault and related cases. All of these specialized positions and others comprise the Loudoun D.A.R.T. that meets monthly to discuss issues and to staff cases.

THE RESULTS

Below are a few of the outcomes and benefits of Loudoun's Domestic Violence Project:

***Safety audit resulted in written individual agency as well as interagency protocols to ensure consistent response and sustained collaboration**

Upon completion of the safety and accountability audit conducted in Loudoun County, all project partners created written policies and procedures regarding domestic violence and family abuse cases, or updated their current policies. As a result of the domestic violence project efforts, the Loudoun Domestic Abuse Response Team (D.A.R.T.) has also devised written

interagency protocols that clarify the working relationship between agencies who provide services to domestic violence victims, offenders, and their children. These written interagency protocols are used as a guide to maintain consistent communication and collaboration in the county's coordinated community response to domestic violence.

***Specialized DV positions have enhanced victim safety as well as offender accountability**

The DV Project's efforts to focus on domestic violence through the use of specialized positions have enhanced victim safety and offender accountability. For example, prior to the creation of the Family Abuse Officer position, there was no one who monitored protection orders issued by the Court. From January 2005 through December 2014, the Family Abuse Officer has monitored 3,426 preliminary and permanent protection orders. The Family Abuse Officer (FAO) monitors these orders by communicating with both the victim and the offender. The FAO ensures all parties understand how to comply with the protection order and can assist with filing motions to amend. The FAO also communicates with the DV Sergeant at the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office and the DV Probation Officers, when appropriate, to share alleged violations.

Similarly, supervision of DV offenders has increased since the inception of Loudoun's DV Project. Prior to the project, a DV defendant who appeared in court may have a criminal charge that resulted in a deferred finding with no probation, no counseling or other court conditions. Only the most egregious cases or repeat offenders were placed on probation supervision. As a result of Loudoun's DV Project efforts, all DV defendants who appear in court are now ordered to undergo an assessment for possible group therapy or other services, and these defendants are placed on supervised probation until all court-ordered conditions are met. In early 2005, one probation officer handled a caseload of 35 offenders. Within the first two years, the caseload

number increased to about 200 cases. Currently, the Loudoun County Department of Community Corrections has four specialized DV Probation Officers who supervise an average of 250 offenders daily.

***Regular meetings promote open communication, mutual problem solving and discussion of new ideas**

Loudoun County has many examples of the benefits of the monthly and quarterly meetings between the project partners. However, one notable example, is an idea proposed by Loudoun D.A.R.T. during its quarterly meeting with the Judges. To increase offender accountability, the Loudoun D.A.R.T suggested the implementation of an automatic 60-day review hearing docket in 2008. For all DV defendants whose adjudication results in a deferred finding or a guilty finding and placement on probation supervision, the defendant is given notice to return to court for a review hearing. The review hearings, scheduled for approximately 60 days after the adjudication hearing, increases offender accountability by ensuring that the abuser is complying with court-ordered conditions. At these hearings, the defendant (and attorney) as well as the defendant's probation officer updates the Court on compliance with individual therapy, substance abuse therapy, Batterer's Intervention therapy, and other court-ordered conditions. The Loudoun County Domestic Violence Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney is also present for these 60-day review hearings.

WORTHINESS OF AN AWARD

Over the last ten years, the County of Loudoun and its project partners have worked diligently to address domestic violence among its residents. Loudoun's Domestic Violence Project is innovative, promotes strong collaboration among project partners, and is a model that

can be replicated in other localities. The primary objective of the project is to protect victims and their children and to hold offenders accountable by improving the criminal justice system's response to domestic violence. The Loudoun Domestic Abuse Response Team has achieved this endeavor through activities such as continuous training of first responders and other service providers, development of written domestic violence protocols to ensure a consistent, collaborative response, implementation of a domestic violence docket and automatic 60-day court review hearings for defendants as well as creation of written resource materials and development of new programs and services.

The Loudoun Domestic Abuse Response Team has gained the attention of its peers throughout the State of Virginia as well as nationally. In 2009, the team was an award recipient in the "*Community Recognition Program for Promising Practices in Domestic Violence Response*" from the Virginia Attorney General's Office. The Loudoun D.A.R.T. recognizes that domestic violence is more than a crime against victims and families, it is also a crime against our community, and our collective response must treat it as such.