

# Using Data in Domestic Violence Work

## Spotlight on the West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence



Professionals in the domestic violence field looking to build individual or organizational data and evaluation capacity are often interested in learning about how others have used data to inform their work. As part of an evidence-based pilot program, the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence: Child Protection and Custody (Resource Center) worked with two pilot sites that had programs or practices already in place that could benefit from enhanced data collection, evaluation, and general capacity building. This snapshot highlights the experiences of the West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WVCADV) in using existing data to understand better the impacts of local policy changes and training programs designed to increase awareness of those changes.

**Data and evaluation-related needs.** The WVCADV organizes numerous training and outreach programs to help increase awareness and application of three statewide policy changes:

- 1. Eliminating all “Failure to Protect” language from petition allegations and replacing with “Knowingly Allow.”** Instead of charging a non-abusive parent with “Failure to Protect,” he or she may be charged with “knowingly allowing” abuse or exposure to domestic violence to occur. In order for a “Knowingly Allow” allegation to be filed against a survivor, the survivor must have taken no steps to protect his/her child(ren) from exposure to domestic violence considering the present circumstances and threats to the non-offending parent.
- 2. Co-petitioning.** Non-offending survivors can actually be a co-petitioner along with Child Protective Services (CPS) in a child protection case. This can empower survivors while helping to ensure that they still have access to the

services they need, without fear of punishment.

- 3. Battered parent adjudication.** The battered parent adjudication option exists for non-offending survivors who may not be ready to co-petition. This is a judicial ruling that can be made in a child abuse and neglect case and is considered a no-fault finding. It means that the survivor does not condone child abuse but is unable to intervene because they themselves are victims.

The WVCADV had three main data and evaluation-related questions. First, were their trainings effective in changing knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding the aforementioned policy changes? Second, to what extent are these changes being implemented statewide? Third, are these changes leading to better outcomes for survivors and children involved in the West Virginia child protection system?

**The process.** The WVCADV had an established relationship with the state Court Improvement Program (CIP) and learned that the CIP was collecting county-wide data on child protection case timelines and outcomes. Efforts also were being made to collect data on the frequency of co-petitioning and battered parent adjudications. In partnership with the CIP, WVCADV staff were able to obtain data on co-petitioning and examine some outcomes between cases with and without co-petitioners. During the data collection and sharing process, it was discovered that the incidence of battered parent adjudications was being recorded incorrectly. Thus, the available data regarding battered parent adjudications were not examined, but recording procedures were corrected so that these data can be explored in the near future.

With TA from the Resource Center, the WVACDV developed and distributed pre- and post-surveys designed to measure the impacts of their trainings on participants' (social work staff, domestic violence advocates, and attorneys) attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors regarding the three policy changes. The pre-survey was distributed immediately prior to the trainings, and the post-survey was distributed 2-3 months following the trainings to assess practice changes.

**Findings and lessons learned.** Data already being collected by the WV CIP helped demonstrate important relationships between co-petitioning and positive child protection case outcomes.

- *First*, data indicated an increase in the extent to which domestic violence survivors were exercising their option to co-petition (approximately 21% of co-petitions were filed by survivors), although there is ample room to increase co-petitioning among survivors.
  - *Second*, data indicated that children in cases with co-petitioners reached permanency at a significantly faster rate than children in cases without co-petitioners.
  - *Third*, data indicated that children in cases with co-petitioners were significantly less likely to be removed from their home than those in cases without co-petitioners.
  - *Not only can these findings be used to help justify and secure program funding, but they also can be used to help promote practice changes*
- The training evaluation survey also highlighted some considerations that have informed WVACDV training and evaluation practices. The response rate to the post-survey, distributed to trainees three months after the training, was unexpectedly low. From this, WVACDV staff learned that:
    - Turnover among training participants was very high. Thus, many initial trainees were no longer in their child protection-related roles and could not be reached via work contact information when the post-survey was distributed. *This signaled to the WVACDV that trainings needed to be conducted more frequently to reach newly hired staff.*
    - There was a need to distribute a post-survey immediately after the trainings instead of (or in addition to) several months later. *Resource Center staff helped the WVACDV revise their post-survey so that it could be distributed right after the trainings and still measure changes in knowledge and attitudes as a result of the training. The survey also asks about participants' plans or intentions to work to change practice in their jurisdiction.*



A project of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges



## ABOUT THE RESOURCE CENTER

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges houses The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence: Child Protection and Custody. The Resource Center is devoted to helping domestic violence survivors and professionals such as judges, attorneys, social workers, and domestic violence advocates who work with survivors in the child protection and custody systems. In addition to providing training and technical assistance, the Resource Center also conducts research and evaluation projects focused on the intersection of domestic violence and child protection or child custody. Contact us by telephone at (800) 527-3223 or by email at [fvinfo@ncjfcj.org](mailto:fvinfo@ncjfcj.org).