



Guidance for Court Administrators

Dear Colleague,

As you review the resources and lessons learned from the Family Court Enhancement Project (FCEP), I would like to encourage you further to take on this work because it is so important. Domestic violence affects millions of Americans each year. The consequences of domestic violence are startling for adults, and children's exposure to domestic violence can have a profound impact on their well-being.

The family court system can be the most critical point of intervention and support when determining safe custody and visitation arrangements, but oftentimes the court system's approach and structure do not lead to outcomes that are in the best interest of the parties or children. Exploring ways in which your system can better address those needs is critical to producing outcomes that can prevent or ameliorate many of the effects caused by domestic violence.

The idea of system change can be overwhelming, but creating a system that is closer to what your community needs is more achievable than you think. The FCEP project sites were fortunate to have the support of technical assistance providers, but most of the changes that were made were the result of a dedicated group of Hennepin County Family Court stakeholders that wanted to do better. By reaching out and working with the individuals and professionals that are engaging with your system, you come to realize where the challenges and opportunities for improvement are. Collaborating and deciding to make changes collectively versus individually creates greater buy-in and makes the process of system reform easier.

As the FCEP Project Coordinator for the Hennepin County Family Court site, I was responsible for administering and managing our program while ensuring that we were meeting the goals of the project. An important part of this role was to bring together our family court community around a common goal of improving custody and visitation outcomes for victims and families experiencing domestic violence. This entailed finding ways to move the discussion forward and keeping the work focused on the end goal. This responsibility can be taken on by various people within your court system as long as they are dedicated to the cause and committed to navigating through challenges.

The benefits of engaging in this work are countless. Exploring, implementing, and assessing new and innovative practices can create lasting, sustainable solutions that are felt throughout your community. By creating a system where you appropriately identify, understand, and respond to the ways people experience domestic violence, you will begin to see an increase in confidence in court users, attorneys, legal service providers, and all of the people that work to help those experiencing domestic violence. After a while you will notice a shift in culture to one where you and your team will constantly be thinking about ways in which you can do better. This is where the real change happens, and it is certainly attainable as long as you are committed and never forget why you started. I encourage you to take the next step and learn about this project and how it can help the people you serve.

Respectfully,

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