

About Us

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Our Vision

To create a network of national and international Family Justice Centers with close working relationships, shared training and technical assistance, collaborative learning processes, and coordinated funding assistance.

Our Purpose

- To serve as the official technical assistance provider for the United States Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women, for all federally funded Family Justice Centers under the President's Family Justice Center Initiative, the New Orleans Family Justice Center Initiative, and Family Justice Centers supported by the Grants to Encourage Arrest Program.

- To provide training, consulting, and strategic planning to pending or existing sites

- To host an annual international conference

- To conduct monthly web-based education programs (webinars)

- To host monthly conference calls with FJC Directors and Centers

- To provide shared learning opportunities such as staff exchange programs, international internships, and other technical, educational support and training to Family Justice Centers across the United States and around the world

- To identify best practices and develop a library of resources related to early intervention, prevention, and co-location of services

⇓ Overview

OVERVIEW

The Family Justice Center Alliance was launched in 2006 in response to the increasing demand for technical assistance from existing and pending Centers across the world. The Family Justice Center Alliance serves as the official technical assistance provider for the United States Department of Justice for federally funded centers and also works with centers outside the federal initiative and abroad. There are currently 30 operational centers in the United States with an additional three international centers operating in Croydon, England; Monterey, Mexico; and Waterloo, Canada with an additional 30 centers in the works.

In addition to technical assistance, training and consulting, the Family Justice Center Alliance hosts an annual international conference, provides shared learning opportunities such as staff exchange programs, international internships, web-based education programs, and training in the area of family violence.

Best Practice Model

In October, 2003, President George W. Bush announced the creation of the President's Family Justice Center Initiative. The \$20 million Initiative began a movement toward more "one stop shop," co-located, multi-disciplinary service centers. The President based his Initiative on the San Diego Family Justice Center model (www.familyjusticecenter.org) which opened in 2002 with staff from 25 public and private agencies co-located together in order to reduce the number of places victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and elder abuse must go to receive needed services. While including many partners, the basic partners in any Family Justice Center are police officers, prosecutors, and community-based advocates.

The Family Justice Center model has been identified as a best practice in the field of domestic violence intervention and prevention services by numerous local, state and national organizations. The documented and published outcomes in the Family Justice Center model have included: reduced homicides; increased victim safety; increased autonomy and empowerment for victims; reduced fear and anxiety for victims and their children; reduced recantation and minimization by victims when wrapped in services and support; increased efficiency in collaborative services to victims among service providers; increased prosecution of offenders; and dramatically increased community support services to victims and their children. (See Casey Gwinn, Gael Strack, *Hope for Hurting Families: Creating Family Justice Centers Across America* (Volcano Press 2006)).

Most recently, Congress recognized the importance of the Family Justice Center movement by including family justice centers as a "purpose area" in Title I of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA 2005). Using a model of collaboration to provide "wraparound" services from one location, the family justice center concept seeks to marshal all available resources in a community into a coordinated, centralized service delivery system with accountability to victims and survivors for the effectiveness of the model.

⇓ History

HISTORY

HISTORY OF THE FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER

- 1989 – The Vision is born
- 1998 – The Partnership & Planning
- 2001 - City Approval
- 2002 - Family Justice Center launched.
- 2004 - Creation of a New Department
- 2006 - National Family Justice Center Alliance is launched
- 2008 - Family Justice Center Alliance becomes a separate

1989 – The Vision is Born

It was September 1989. After a phone call from City Attorney John Witt, the District Attorney had agreed to listen to a proposal for a "one stop shop" domestic violence service center in San Diego. Deputy City Attorney Casey Gwinn had written a ten page proposal to be distributed to all the supervisors in the DA's Office. The premise was simple: Victims would have an easier time receiving needed services if they only had to go one place to get all the necessary help.

When Deputy City Attorney Casey Gwinn arrived in the DA's Office on the 14th floor of the Wells Fargo Building downtown, he was ushered into the main conference room. The heads of each branch were present along with the District Attorney, the Assistant District Attorney, and the Chief Deputy District Attorney. Gwinn's proposal was passed out and he was given the floor for twenty minutes. After the conclusion of his presentation, there were a few questions and Gwinn was ushered out. He never got a formal response to his proposal; not a week later, not a month later. It was fair to say that a "one stop shop" for domestic violence victims was an idea whose time had not come.

Even after that discouraging day, though, the City Attorney's office remained determined to move forward with the concept. By the early 1990's, the YWCA and CCS were invited to be on-site partners. The City Attorney's Child Abuse and Domestic Violence (CADV) Unit expanded its own advocacy program with grants and City General Fund revenue. Soon thereafter, staff from the District Attorney's Victim-Witness Program joined the City Attorney's CADV Unit and the attorneys were cross-deputized to handle felonies as well as misdemeanors.

As part of the City Attorney's determination to move forward with a limited one stop shop, prosecutors and detectives began rotating over to each other's offices on a weekly basis. The City Attorney successfully pursued grants for partnerships with Children's Hospital and Child Protective Services. Within a year of that humble beginning to a multi-disciplinary service center it was abundantly clear that the idea was the right one. Victims could get a restraining order and see a prosecutor. They could talk to a detective and meet with an advocate from Children's Hospital; co-located, multi-disciplinary services were an idea whose time had come.

1998 – The Partnership & Planning

Finally, in 1998, David Bejarano became the Police Chief of San Diego. Within six months, he and City Attorney Casey Gwinn sat down and talked about two initiatives: 1) Creation of a Neighborhood Prosecution Unit; and 2) Creation of a One Stop Shop for victims of domestic violence. They took the idea of co-located services to the next step. They created a Planning Team led by Assistant Chief Rulette Armstead and Assistant City Attorney Gael Strack which included Lt. Jim Barker, Sgt. Monica Kaiser, Head Deputy City Attorney Brian Erickson, Senior Analyst Mary Ann Stepnowsky, Senior Advocate Kimberly Pearce, Investigator Chris Lee, Senior Legal Secretary Marta Overly, and Information Technology Analyst Kevin Westover. Together, they held community forums, conducted focus groups, and visited other sites. A feasibility study was ultimately completed by Sgt. Monica Kaiser from the San Diego Police Department.

2001 – City Approval

By October 2001, City Attorney Casey Gwinn and former Police Chief David Bejarano, with the support from the community and the San Diego Domestic Violence Council, were ready to formally propose the creation of a one-stop help center in the City of San Diego for victims of domestic violence. They sought approval before the Public Safety and Neighborhood Services (PS&NS) Committee of the City Council. At the hearing, they outlined the City's 15-year response to domestic violence, the current problem and the potential solution – the San Diego Family Justice Center. Gwinn and Bejarano also documented the planning and preparation for a Family Justice Center over the previous years. As a result of these efforts, they concluded the time was right to move forward with concrete plans for a Family Justice Center. Their proposal included best practices, local partners, proven strategies, innovative programs and an ideal site. After public comment, the PS&NS Committee unanimously directed Gwinn and Bejarano to submit their plan to the City Council for their review and approval.

2002 – The San Diego Family Justice Center is Launched

In April 2002, the Mayor, City Council, and City Manager unanimously supported a proposal from Gwinn and Bejarano to open a Family Justice Center in the heart of downtown San Diego. The new Center promised to be one of the most significant initiatives to help domestic violence victims in this region in the past 20 years. The vision was to bring over 20 agencies and over 100 domestic violence professionals under one roof. The goal was simple: consolidate San Diego's efforts and expertise to provide more services, more safety, and more justice to victims and their children. The Family Justice Center was poised to be the first facility in the country to house: the Police Department's entire Domestic Violence Unit (40), the City Attorney's Domestic Violence Unit (35), and staff from approximately 20 other community nonprofit domestic violence and sexual assault agencies and county agencies. For the first time in the history of San Diego, the criminal justice community would have the opportunity to offer a wide range of services and tap the expertise of many professionals from a single location.

With the unanimous vote from the Mayor and City Council, the Family Justice Center was launched and the 15 year-old dream to one day provide victims of family violence services from one location was finally becoming a reality. The vision of the San Diego Family Justice Center had the full support of over forty community organizations and the County's entire Congressional delegation and State legislative delegation. The Planning Team went to work and began developing floor plans, protocols, and partnership agreements. Sgt. Robert Keetch was assigned to the Family Justice Center as the Project Manager by the San Diego Police Chief.

On October 10, 2002, the San Diego Family Justice Center opened its doors. Victims of domestic violence in the City of San Diego could now come to one location to talk to an advocate, get a restraining order, plan for their safety, talk to a police officer, meet with a prosecutor, receive medical assistance, counsel with a chaplain, get help with transportation, and obtain nutrition and pregnancy services counseling. During the first month the Family Justice Center welcomed over 87 clients and received over 650 phone calls for assistance. Today, the Family Justice Center averages over 500 clients and 3,000 phone calls per month.

2004 – The Creation of a New Family Justice Center Department

Given the tremendous success and growth of the Family Justice Center during the first 24 months of operation, it became clear to City policy makers and community leaders that a clear governance structure was needed to ensure its continued benefits to the citizens of San Diego. The loosely structured collaboration under the auspices of the City Attorney and Police Chief had succeeded in creating the Family Justice Center, but a clear governance structure was crucial to the long-term success of the Center. In October 2004, City Manager Lamont Ewell, Police Chief William Lansdowne, Fire Chief Jeff Bowman and City Attorney Casey Gwinn proposed a city ordinance to establish a new City Department, separate from the City Attorney's Office and the San Diego Police Department, to support and advance the mission, goals, management, operation and future challenges of the San Diego Family Justice Center.

On November 15, 2004, the Mayor and City Council unanimously approved the proposed Ordinance to create the Office of the San Diego Family Justice Center, with a new Director reporting to the City Manager and a Steering Committee. The Steering Committee consists of the Chair of PS&NS, the Director of the FJC and representatives from the San Diego Police Department, City Attorney's Office, and the District Attorney's Office. The Steering Committee's role is to assist the City Manager in developing and overseeing the operational guidelines for the Family Justice Center, developing a Long Range Strategic Plan, and making recommendations pertaining to programs, priorities and the annual budget for the Family Justice Center to the Mayor and Council.

On December 4, 2004, Gael Strack was appointed by City Manager Lamont Ewell as the Director of the Office of the San Diego Family Justice Center. Department Staff includes: Jean Emmons, Executive Secretary; Kimberly Pearce, Director of Client Services, and Diana Monaco, Grants Analyst. On special assignment from the San Diego Police Department is Sgt. Robert Keetch, Project/Office Manager.

2006 – The National Family Justice Center Alliance was launched

The National Family Justice Center Alliance was launched in 2006 as a program of the San Diego Family Justice Center Foundation and in response to the increasing demand for technical assistance from existing and pending Centers across the world.

2008 – Family Justice Center Alliance becomes its own non-profit organization.

Due to the tremendous demand for technical assistance by new and emerging family justice centers around the world, it became clear to board members of the San Diego Family Justice Center Foundation that a new governance structure was needed to ensure a continued focus on the San Diego Family Justice Center, Camp Hope and also the growing National Family Justice Center Alliance. As a result, Gael Strack left the San Diego Family Justice Center in May 2007 and Casey Gwinn left to San Diego Family Justice Center Foundation in December 2007. In January 2008, the Family Justice Center Alliance was officially launched as a new and separate non-profit organization with a new board of trustees.

⇓ Voices

VOICES

VOICES is a national advocacy committee sponsored by the Verizon Foundation. Its members, many of whom have received services at a Family Justice Center, are survivors of domestic violence now celebrating their strength and survival by using their voices in the hopes of helping others through advocacy, education and empowerment. VOICES also seeks to develop communication protocols, opportunities for public speaking and advocacy, and a strategic plan for development of National Chapters.

VOICES History

VOICES was launched in San Diego in 2002. At that time, members of VOICES served as an advisory committee for the San Diego Family Justice Center, assisted with training and spoke at various public events to bring awareness to the services provided at the Family Justice Center.

VOICES Nationally

VOICES is developing an outreach effort to create a nationwide group of survivors to educate the public about family violence, and support new and existing Family Justice Centers. This national movement is supported by a Steering Committee, Chaired by Yolanda Matos (Executive Director of Valley Crisis Center) and Co-Chaired by Dr. Diane Lass (Integrated Mental Health Services, San Diego FJC) and the Family Justice Center Alliance. The vision of the National VOICES Steering Committee is to include various members from other VOICES Chapters.

VOICES San Diego

Currently VOICES in San Diego is Chaired by Lana Culliver and Co-Chaired by Julie Solis and has 20 active members. VOICES San Diego members have developed a speaker's bureau and are available to speak as keynote speakers at community events, trainings, and conferences. Members are also involved in communicating with elected officials, providing a presence at media events, educational and awareness programs and writing letters to those who can spark change and increase support for victims and their families. Another project that has begun in San Diego is development of a DV training video which will include a PowerPoint presentation, heartfelt personal stories and curriculum which can be used live or via internet for training. The target date for completion of this training video is July 2009.

VOICES New Chapters

Nampa Family Justice Center in Nampa, Idaho, founded in 2008 and Chaired by Kimberly Middleton.

For more information about starting your VOICES Chapter, contact Yolanda Matos at matosvcc@netscape.net or by phone 208-465-5011.