

**San Diego Family Justice Center Focus Groups**  
**Summary Prepared by Child and Adolescent Services Research Center**  
**July 21, 2004**

This report summarizes the findings from five focus groups conducted by the San Diego Family Justice Center (FJC) between April and July 2004. Three English-speaking groups were conducted with a total of 17 women participating, one group was made up of 7 Spanish-speaking women and one group consisted of 3 men for an overall total of 27 participants. Participants commented on a range of services received by the Family Justice Center. Primary themes summarized below are as follows: (a) helpful aspects of services; (b) benefits of services and perceived changes resulting from services; and (c) recommendations made by participants.

### **Helpful Aspects of Services**

- Caring personnel
  - Staff members were described as friendly, helpful, patient, comforting, and reassuring.
  - Staff was available when needed and took the time to listen.
  - Contact with staff left clients feeling respected and safe.
- Safe environment
  - Clients reported feeling safe at the Family Justice Center.
  - They described the center as a warm, comfortable place in a good location where they could go for respite and to access services.

*"For the first time in months, for the first few months of my experiences, I felt safe here. I was here from open to closing because I felt so safe here and this was really important to me."*
- Professional organization
  - The services were provided in a quick and efficient manner.
  - The services were also seen as being very responsive to addressing problems and meeting needs (such as legal assistance to obtain restraining orders).
- Helpful services provided
  - In addition to the main services offered, clients appreciated getting information on next steps, referrals for other services and help in communicating with others in the "system".
  - Clients also commented on the convenience of having needed services under one roof.

*"Having all the services together in one place was so nice, I can't even tell you!"*

### **Benefits of Services/Perceived Changes Resulting from Services**

*". . . they helped me here . . . My life is much better now that it was before. I feel more able to take care of myself and stronger. Before I came here I was scared of everything. It has changed me a lot. I can stand up for myself more. I'm not as afraid."*

- Participants reported feeling stronger and more independent, better able to care for themselves, and not as afraid.
- They reported having improved relationships with others.
- They described themselves as being able to make better/stronger decisions and to pursue goals again (e.g., return to school).

- They felt that they were able to make changes that resulted in obtaining visitation with their children or having them back in their custody.
- Clients indicated that they were comforted by the recognition that they are not alone and could see that others were going through the same thing.

*"It made me feel like I was not alone; other people have experienced what I went through. The people here who I talked with understood my situation and validated my experience. That made me stronger."*

## Concerns

- General
  - Concerns were expressed about police or legal system response:
    - police handling of cases
    - delays in legal proceedings
    - lack of knowledge about what is occurring with the offender with regard to the criminal justice system
 

*"I would like to be in the loop of what happens with my offender. . . I continue to file police reports. But not knowing what happens when I file, and where he is, is a big concern for me."*
    - follow-through to ensure guns are taken from offenders
  - Concerns were expressed about the impact of exposure to violence on their children; most of the participants who had children stated that the children were in counseling or needed counseling.
 

*"I feel really guilty because for years my children lived in a home full of domestic violence. Because they suffered, they need to go to therapy for a long time. I hope they will continue to go to therapy and will continue to heal. I want them to understand that they do not need to live that way."*
  - Some concerns were also expressed about the quality of shelter/housing currently available for victims of domestic violence.
- Specific to FJC:
  - Being turned away from services because not eligible or service wasn't available.
  - Negative encounters with some staff members.

## Recommendations Suggested by Participants

- Fine-tuning existing services
  - Importance of having staff and volunteers who are well trained and compassionate; knowledgeable about services and resources available within and outside the FJC.
  - Importance of being able to speak to a person when calling, rather than a message or recording.
  - Improved communication regarding services available on site when people first come in.
 

*"Find ways to make sure people are more aware of all the services that are available. Not just that the center exists, but what it has to offer."*
  - Conduct intakes in a private area, not the waiting room.
  - Offer male "friendly" services (e.g., provide written materials that are gender neutral, include more men on staff)

*"If there had been more males working here, that would have helped me open up. If a male would help me or I saw more males here I might feel more comfortable."*

- Additional services
  - Support groups that meet monthly
  - Monthly lunches with presentations on topics such as housing
  - Additional legal clinic lawyers to decrease waiting time
  - Employment assistance
  - Financial support, temporary financial assistance
  - Counseling for children affected by the violence
  - Childcare
  - Onsite phone banks to make and receive calls
  - Help with moving; storage assistance (for personal possessions such as furniture)