

Families

**Strengthening**

Women

Household

Friends

Law Enforcement

Safe Place

the **Judicial Response**

Children

Social Awareness

Families

Mental, Verbal, Physical

Judges

Support

Counseling

Courts

to **Domestic Violence**

Legal

Process **Enforcement**

Legal

Mental, Verbal, Physical Abuse

Friends

**Justice**

**Intervention**

State Attorney

Household

Law

Victims' Rights

The Duval County, Florida Experience -  
A Resource for Community Collaboration

# Contents

Introduction	3
Background	4
Partners	6
The Funding Application and Original Concept	9
The Early Stages: Planning and Implementation	10
The Operation of the Domestic Violence Court Docket	12
Associated Programs: CPDV, InVEST, Batterers' Intervention	17
Learning from the Past and Looking to the Future	19



# Introduction

In 2008, community partners in Jacksonville, Florida came together to create a dedicated domestic violence court docket for Duval County in Northeast Florida. The partners obtained initial funding in 2008 and continuation funding in 2012 from the Grants to Encourage Arrest Policies and Enforcement of Protection Orders Program (Arrest Grant) of the U. S. Justice Department's Office on Violence Against Women (OVW). The City of Jacksonville, the Fourth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida, the State Attorney for the Fourth Judicial Circuit of Florida, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, and Hubbard House, Inc. formed a partnership to improve victim safety and increase offender accountability through a centralized domestic violence court docket, with trained judges and support staff, who would provide a coordinated judicial response to domestic violence in Duval County. An additional goal of the partnership was to establish an in-custody batterers' intervention program. The partners also sought to strengthen two existing community programs, the Center for Prevention of Domestic Violence (CPDV), which assists victims seeking injunctions, and the Intimate Violence Enhanced Services Team (InVEST), a community collaboration that reviews domestic violence police reports to assess for potential lethality and offers specialized services to those victims.

The purpose of this document is to describe the process of planning and operating the Domestic Violence Court Docket. It is designed to serve both as a record of what the partners have achieved and as a resource for other communities that might wish to consider the creation of a specialty domestic violence court or docket. In addition, the experiences of the partners to this collaboration may transfer to many other types of community programs. The partners hope that their experiences will be helpful to government agencies and non-profit service providers in other types of community collaborations designed to address domestic and sexual violence.

In creating the Domestic Violence Court Docket for Duval County, the partners succeeded in reinforcing existing linkages and creating new ones with key participants and stakeholders, thus substantially strengthening an already robust community commitment to the empowerment of victims of domestic violence through systemic action. In testament to that commitment, the partners sought and obtained funding from other sources for most functions so that, even though funding from the OVW grant ended in June of 2015, the Domestic Violence Court Docket continues to operate, with the partners further committed to sustaining its achievements and improving and enhancing its operations and scope.

# Background

Creation of the Domestic Violence Court Docket for Duval County, Florida was the logical progression in a long history of social and political action directed toward addressing domestic violence in the community. Domestic violence activism in Jacksonville dates from the earliest days of the movement nationally; its signal event was the founding of Hubbard House in 1976 as the first shelter in Florida specifically for victims of domestic violence.

In the 1980s, Jacksonville inaugurated the Domestic Violence Intervention Project (DVIP) with the State Attorney's Office, the Fourth Judicial Circuit Court, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, the Clerk of Courts, Hubbard House, the Salvation Army, the U.S. Navy, and other agencies. In monthly meetings, members of DVIP continue to collaborate with the goal of protecting victims of domestic violence and their children, holding perpetrators accountable, and improving the judicial system's civil and criminal response to domestic violence.

In the 1990s, the Mayor of the City of Jacksonville implemented a domestic violence task force that studied the various issues on a sustained basis and then made several recommendations for improvement in the community's response to domestic violence. One of those recommendations involved a collaborative effort among the Judiciary, the Clerk of Courts, the State Attorney's Office, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, and Hubbard House to establish the Center for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (CPDV).

The Mayor's Task Force on Domestic Violence determined that the process for petitioners to get a protective order in Jacksonville was very cumbersome and needed to be simplified. It also strongly recommended that victim advocates be part of the process to safety plan with petitioners and help refer them to appropriate services. The State Attorney's Office, the Clerk of Courts, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, the Judiciary, and Hubbard House worked together to create one place where a victim could go to get an injunction for protection and all of the resources would be at this location for that victim, rather than the victim having to go to multiple locations. The establishment of the CPDV formed a crucial cornerstone for future efforts to strengthen the response of the justice system to domestic violence in the community.

An important additional community program resulted from critical needs identified through the City of Jacksonville's leadership on domestic violence issues. The Intimate Violence Enhanced Services Team (InVEST) was created as a multi-disciplinary team to work intensively with families who are identified to be at greatest risk of severe injury or death due to domestic violence. The InVEST partners, City of Jacksonville, Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, and Hubbard House, provide enhanced response, intensive support, and strengthened follow-up investigation of high-risk-for-fatality domestic violence cases.

Community collaborations directed to domestic violence were further strengthened when in 2004 Duval County was selected by the Department of Justice to be one of two demonstration projects to develop and implement coordinated domestic violence services between the military and civilian communities. In 2005, a historic Memorandum of Understanding was signed among several military and civilian agencies. As part of this process, civil and criminal systems were assessed and initial findings reported. One of these findings was that it is vital that all petitioners speak to a victim advocate and receive safety planning; therefore the military/civilian project participated in providing support for the Center for the Prevention of Domestic Violence.

Also in the mid-2000s, the City of Jacksonville spearheaded community collaboration, initially funded by the Office on Violence Against Women, among the City, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, the State Attorney's Office, the Women's Center of Jacksonville, Hubbard House, and the Salvation Army to address domestic and sexual violence in later life. This initiative focused heavily on law enforcement training, victim safety, and holding perpetrators accountable through the criminal justice system. Successor programs continue to serve the needs of elders in the community.

Throughout this long history of collaboration, the various partners engaged in ongoing discussions about how systems could be improved to better serve victims. The goal of creating a domestic violence court program for Duval County emerged from these discussions, and eventually funding was sought to make this goal a reality.

**The establishment of the CPDV formed a crucial cornerstone for future efforts to strengthen the response of the justice system to domestic violence in the community.**

# The Partners



Jacksonville, Florida is a unique community. The city and county (Duval County) are consolidated so its citizens are served by one government with one police department (Jacksonville Sheriff's Office). This fact puts the community in a unique position to form successful collaborations to improve the judicial response to domestic violence. Unlike many areas in the state and nation, services and procedures do not have to be coordinated among many different police departments and governmental entities. In addition, based on long experience, the partners agree that there is a welcoming and collaborative culture in the community that transcends political and ideological differences and forms a strong foundation for efforts designed to improve societal problems. The partners' solid collaborative history and the individual expertise of each in addressing domestic violence in the community created a strong foundation for pursuing the next logical step: establishment of a dedicated domestic violence court or court docket for Duval County.

## City of Jacksonville (the City)

The [City of Jacksonville](#) is the governmental entity that serves the consolidated areas of Jacksonville and Duval County, Florida. Jacksonville is the largest city by population in the state of Florida (885,855) and the largest by area in the continental United States (774 square miles). The City is the lead agency for the domestic violence court project as originally constituted and was the applicant for initial and continuation funding from the Office on Violence Against Women's Arrest Grant program. The City's Social Services Division administers the project and coordinates activities with the other partners, Hubbard House, Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, the State Attorney's Office, and the Fourth Judicial Circuit Court. The City monitors the contracts, administers all financial aspects, and is responsible for all reporting of project activities.

In addition, the City of Jacksonville provides substantive participation in the project through its Victim Services Center. The Center provides appropriate services to victims of domestic violence and their families, including information and referral, and emergency financial assistance. Center staff are responsible for the City's participation with the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office and Hubbard House in the InVEST program.

## Fourth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida (the Court)

The Florida Courts System is divided into five districts that are made up of 20 judicial circuits and are further broken down into 67 counties. [The Fourth Judicial Circuit](#) serves Duval, Clay, and Nassau Counties. The Domestic Violence Court Docket functions in Duval County, the largest of the three counties.

The Fourth Judicial Circuit Court has primary responsibility for operation of the Domestic Violence Court Docket. The Court provides coordination and case management as well as judges and other personnel, funded from several sources.

Prior to the initiation of the Domestic Violence Court Docket, the Fourth Judicial Circuit Court has had a very successful track record in the design and operation of specialty courts, with adult criminal, juvenile delinquency, and juvenile dependency drug courts in operation for several years. The Court also has experience with implementation of mental health and veterans' treatment courts in recent years. In planning for the establishment of the Domestic Violence Court Docket, the partners were able to draw upon the expertise of people experienced in setting up specialty courts within the jurisdiction.

## Hubbard House, Inc. (Hubbard House)

[Hubbard House](#) is the only organization in Duval County certified by the Florida Department of Children and Families to provide services to victims of domestic violence. As such, Hubbard House has responsibility for victim advocacy and direct service provision of domestic violence intervention services for the project through advocates working with the Fourth Judicial Circuit Court, the Center for Prevention of Domestic Violence, and the InVEST program.

Hubbard House was founded in 1976, making it the oldest shelter specifically for victims of domestic violence and their children in Florida. Hubbard House is a full-service certified domestic violence center serving Duval and Baker counties. In addition to the 24-hour crisis hotline and emergency shelter, the agency operates a therapeutic day care center; outreach counseling for women and children; teen group counseling; school-based educational programs; extensive community education activities; emergency response advocacy with police and medical personnel; other collaborative programs with local agencies; and First Step, a 26-week batterers' intervention program.

## *The Partners continued*

### **Jacksonville Sheriff's Office (JSO)**

The [Jacksonville Sheriff's Office](#) has primary responsibility for all law enforcement aspects of the Domestic Violence Court Docket, with particular emphasis on the investigation, identification, and offender monitoring components of the InVEST program. The stated mission of the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office is to protect the lives and property of the citizens of the community, to preserve the peace and to prevent crime and disorder while constantly guarding personal liberties as prescribed by law. The JSO has long emphasized the importance of community involvement and support in its mission of protecting the citizens of Duval County; JSO is therefore a partner in many community initiatives, including several specifically directed to addressing domestic violence.

### **State Attorney for the Fourth Judicial Circuit of Florida (State Attorney's Office)**

The [State Attorney for the Fourth Judicial Circuit](#) is responsible for the prosecution of all crimes committed in Duval, Clay, and Nassau Counties. The State Attorney's Office provides prosecution and victim advocacy services in Duval County in connection with domestic violence offenses. The State Attorney's Office has a long-standing commitment to innovative and proactive programs designed to enhance perpetrator accountability and victim safety and has a robust history of collaboration in community initiatives, including those directed to addressing domestic violence.



The first funding application, submitted in 2008, proposed the establishment of a dedicated domestic violence court for Duval County, as well as additional support to strengthen and enhance the two existing programs, the Center for Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Intimate Violence Enhanced Services Team.

As originally contemplated, the specialized domestic violence court would have the following components: trained, specialized judges dedicated to a centralized docket to ensure a more informed and consistent judicial response to domestic violence offenses, which would also include the additional resource of an in-custody batterers' intervention program; enhanced provision of comprehensive services to victims of domestic violence and increased communication between the court, victim advocates, and other courts to improve victim safety; ongoing judicial monitoring of offender/respondent compliance to ensure greater offender accountability; and coordination with existing community partnerships to ensure an enhanced community response to domestic violence. The original application sought funding for two court case manager positions, a part-time prosecutor, a part-time paralegal, and a domestic violence victim advocate to be assigned to the court. In addition, funding was sought for one victim advocate for CPDV and one detective, one victim advocate, and one training coordinator for InVEST. Prior to submission of the application, the partners consulted with several judges and obtained agreement from four of them to be part of a pilot program should the grant application be successful.

Specialized domestic violence courts vary widely in their organization, but fall generally into two categories. Some jurisdictions have set up completely separate courts, with dedicated court administration and specifically assigned judges who hear only domestic violence cases. In some jurisdictions, these judges hear only civil cases, and in others, the same judges hear related civil and criminal cases. Other jurisdictions have what would be more accurately called a domestic court docket or schedule in which judges hear domestic violence cases among other types of cases, but have dedicated support staff and processes in place for the handling of domestic violence cases.

The partners to the original funding application contemplated a court of the first type, a separate court that would hear only domestic violence cases, with a limited number of specific judges assigned to that court. The funding application did provide for a planning period that would focus on determining the details of the model for the local court, and which contemplated that further best practice research would possibly lead the partners in a different direction, but the application for funding was based on the assumption that the court would be a separate, dedicated domestic violence court. As planning developed, it was determined that the second type of court, a domestic violence docket or court calendar, would be the most feasible organizational model for Duval County.

## The Early Stages: Planning and Implementation

The City of Jacksonville was notified in September of 2008 that the grant to establish the domestic violence court was awarded. In spite of the careful planning that went into the grant application, there was a considerable delay of many months before the Domestic Violence Court Docket became operational. The administrative delay occurred because the lead agency and three of the subcontracting agencies were all governmental units. The three government subcontracting partners, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, the Fourth Judicial Circuit Court, and the State Attorney's Office each had unique and somewhat complicated financial and personnel policies and procedures. Determining how some of the financial and programmatic reporting would take place, as well as the mechanics of how the positions involved would be handled throughout the various accounting and personnel offices was a challenge, primarily because it had never been accomplished on the scale needed prior to implementation of the Domestic Violence Court Docket.

The details of the process took a considerable amount of time, with many consultations by meetings, phone calls, and emails. In addition, the legislation related to the grant was also new and required several extensive revisions. Actual legislation for any grant-funded project must be submitted via a lengthy process involving the review and approval of the City Council and its various committee reviews, as well as a public comment opportunity.

By the summer of 2009, the partners were still working on resolving the various administrative issues, but were also ready to move forward with program development. Focus of partner meetings evolved from administrative issues to programmatic planning and execution. An important aspect of this execution was the filling of positions funded under the grant. Two court program specialists were hired and began assisting with efforts to establish the Domestic Violence Court Docket. In addition, two Hubbard House victim advocate positions were filled and located at the Center for the Prevention of Domestic Violence. The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office detective position was filled, and the detective began working with the other grant partners in the InVEST program to help identify the most lethal domestic violence cases. The detective also began working with the prosecutors in the State Attorney's Office to increase the number of prosecutions of domestic violence perpetrators.

Another important staffing decision made by the partners during this period was that funding for the City of Jacksonville's training position that was part of the original grant application was diverted to Hubbard House for an additional victim advocate position to work with the InVEST program. In return, Hubbard House agreed to assume the community trainer activities that the training coordinator position would have conducted. The partners made this decision based on the perceived need for additional direct client advocacy services and the understanding that Hubbard House's existing and extensive training activities could absorb the training needs of the project.

One important programmatic goal was achieved in July of 2009, with the inauguration of the In-Custody Batterers' Intervention Program. This feature gives judges the option of ensuring that defendants receive much needed intervention while in custody. The Hubbard House Batterers' Intervention Program has historically been shown to be highly effective for those completing the program; however, ensuring completion has always been an issue. Some defendants would actually choose to be incarcerated rather than completing the course. The in-custody program greatly strengthens the judge's ability to deal with this issue: the judge can order the offender to jail and require participation in the jail-based program and still require completion of a certified community program upon release.

As planning progressed into 2010, further detailed time and attention was devoted to determining the type of organization the court would have. Initially the planners were focused on creating a separate domestic violence court within the judicial system. After much research and discussion, it was determined that this model would not be best suited to Duval County. The partners, in consultation with the judges from County Court, who hear the majority of domestic violence criminal cases, made the decision to use a dedicated docket model. This decision was reached after meetings that included a majority of the 17 County Court judges. Five County Court judges were selected to hear cases using the newly created Domestic Violence Court Docket.

Further meetings were held among the judges and representatives from the partner agencies to analyze processes and procedures essential to implementing the court plan; to identify documents needed to implement the project; and to plan a timeline of subsequent meetings to finalize court objectives and determine the types of domestic violence cases that would be assigned to the Domestic Violence Court Docket.



# Operation of the Domestic Violence Court Docket

The organization of courts in Florida consists of the Supreme Court, the five District Courts of Appeal, the Circuit Courts, and County Courts. There are 20 judicial circuits in the Florida court system. Some circuits are made up of multiple counties. The Fourth Judicial Circuit is comprised of Duval, Clay, and Nassau Counties, but the Domestic Violence Court Docket is in operation only in Duval County, the largest county in the circuit, which encompasses the city of Jacksonville.

Florida has a two-tiered trial court system. In each circuit there are two types of trial courts, the circuit court and the county courts. Circuit courts have general trial jurisdiction over matters not specifically assigned by statute to the county courts and also hear appeals from county court cases. Circuit courts have jurisdiction over family law cases as well as petitions for injunctions for protection. The second type of trial court is the county court, one for each county in Florida. The county courts have jurisdiction over criminal misdemeanors, traffic offenses, and smaller monetary claims.

Both circuit courts and county courts are involved in domestic violence matters in Florida, circuit courts handling family law matters, injunctions for protection, and felony domestic violence cases, and county courts handling misdemeanor domestic violence cases. Because the vast majority of domestic violence cases that come before the courts are misdemeanors under Florida law, the county court is the center of the organizational and operational activities for any domestic violence court or court docket, supplemented, of course, by the critical role of the circuit court in hearing and granting injunctions for protection.

The official date for the inauguration of the Domestic Violence Court Docket for Duval County was October 8, 2010 when the partners held a press conference in connection with Domestic Violence Awareness Month to announce its creation. Local media covered the press conference, and several news stories appeared announcing the partnership and the creation of the Domestic Violence Court Docket.

While the original plan was to have a separate court with a small number of judges dedicated to the court, it was determined later in the planning phase that the separate court model would not be feasible in Duval County. Therefore, the organization of the court as constituted for operation was based on a docket model, and it continues to function in that manner today. The Domestic Violence Court Docket began operation with 13 of 17 County Court judges, who presided over domestic violence cases as well

as other types of cases. This level of participation in the Domestic Violence Court Docket by the County Court judges evidenced strong support for the program; initially, five judges were designated to participate, but by the time the court was operational, this number had grown to 13. This number has remained essentially constant throughout the program.

These judges have jurisdiction over charges of misdemeanor domestic violence, which constitute the vast majority of domestic violence charges in Duval County. The initial appearance of accused offenders in Florida is “first appearance,” which by law must take place within 24 hours of arrest. At first appearance, the participating judges identify those cases to be transferred to the specialized docket.

One important criterion is that the case involves intimate partner domestic violence. The definition of domestic violence in Florida is very broad and covers battery and other assaults in a broad category of relationships, including people who are related by blood or marriage or who are living together or have lived together as a family. This broad definition means that violence in many non-intimate partner relationships meets the definition of domestic violence in Florida. The focus of the Domestic Violence Court Docket is violence in intimate partner relationships, which are categorized from the statutory definition as spouses, former spouses, and intimate partners who are living together or who have lived together or who have a child in common.

From the beginning of operation, judges participating in the Domestic Violence Court Docket preside over assigned cases from arraignment through disposition. The Domestic Violence Court Docket has ensured that misdemeanor domestic violence cases in Duval County are handled in an efficient and consistent manner by judges with a specialized calendar and an enhanced focus on victim safety. From the very beginning, significant progress was made in providing services to victims. Funding from the grant made it possible for far greater outreach to victims than before the project was initiated. Hubbard House victim advocates are now present at criminal court proceedings and making contact prior to hearings to offer support services and safety planning to victims, in addition to the ongoing support provided by victim advocates in the State Attorney’s Office. This heightened attention to the needs of victims is an important corollary to the enhanced victim advocacy made possible through grant funding in the Center for Prevention of Domestic Violence, which provides support and safety planning to victims when they come to file an injunction for protection.

**The Domestic Violence Court Docket has ensured that misdemeanor domestic violence cases in Duval County are handled in an efficient and consistent manner...**



The partners have developed and approved a domestic violence calendar which sets specific times and dates for the participating judges to hear domestic violence cases. The calendar is distributed on a periodic basis to the participating judges. The case managers employed by the court play a crucial role in marshalling the information the judges need for each case and in coordinating data collection and monitoring defendants' compliance with court-mandated requirements, such as participation in a batterers' intervention program.

Victim advocates from Hubbard House are involved at all stages in the proceedings to provide education, safety planning, court accompaniment, and other services to victims. Proactive and early contact by Hubbard House advocates is a hallmark of the Domestic Violence Court Docket. Court case managers send Hubbard House information from every misdemeanor arrest and booking report. A Hubbard House victim advocate then contacts every victim to counsel them about safety planning, victims' compensation, and victims' rights. A Hubbard House victim advocate attends the scheduled court hearings and meets with victims who attend. The Hubbard House advocate also attends other hearings at the victim's request. While at the hearing, the advocate provides emotional support, safety planning, and other services as needed.

Another important factor in the ability of Hubbard House advocates to be proactive is the collaboration with the State Attorney's Office. At first appearance, victim advocates from the State Attorney's Office are present to provide support to victims. The State Attorney advocates serve as a liaison with Hubbard House, making sure that victims have information they need to access Hubbard House services and sharing information with Hubbard House about the victim's needs so that Hubbard House advocates can proactively offer necessary safety planning and other critical services. The Hubbard House advocates may then further act as a liaison between the State Attorney's Office and the victim at the victim's request. This cooperation provides a high level of victim support during the criminal process, which is especially important in advancing victim cooperation with the prosecution, thereby creating a greater likelihood of holding the perpetrator accountable.

One of the reasons that early contact with Hubbard House advocates is a critical component of the Domestic Violence Court Docket is that, unlike the Court staff and staff of the State Attorney's Office, under Florida law Hubbard House advocates have a legally privileged relationship with victims of domestic violence. This privilege is especially vital in safety planning because it encourages the victim to be more forthcoming with important details that she may fear being disclosed to the court or to

her perpetrator. Court staff, the State Attorney's Office, and Hubbard House have put in place protocols and procedures to protect and safeguard the privilege and the communications protected by it, for example, by affording a private place for conversations.

Victim advocacy services provided through the dedicated Domestic Violence Court Docket and the Center for Prevention of Domestic Violence are based on an empowerment model. Victim advocates educate, safety plan, provide emotional support, explain legal and other processes, and provide referrals to other community services, but these services are in no way contingent on the victim behaving in a certain way or making choices that staff perceive to be in her best interest, but that the victim does not.

The Domestic Violence Court Docket procedures have thus enhanced victim safety in many ways. For example, before the dedicated Domestic Violence Court Docket, which incorporates early victim contact, there were often obstacles regarding Hubbard House victim advocates making safe contact with victims. Hubbard House victim advocates are now able to make contact with the victims before court due to the information received from the Domestic Violence Court Docket case managers and the State Attorney's Office. The Domestic Violence Court Docket ensures that misdemeanor domestic violence cases in Duval County are handled in an efficient and consistent manner by judges with a dedicated docket and a focus on enhanced victim safety and enhanced offender accountability.

Information sharing early in the process can aid victims in other ways as well. One example is assistance in getting service of process for injunctions. Sometimes when the Hubbard House advocate makes early initial contact with a victim through information provided by case managers and the State Attorney's Office, the advocate discovers that the respondent has been evading service of a temporary injunction for protection. The Hubbard House advocate can then work with the victim to have her come to a criminal court hearing with her temporary injunction paperwork, and supported by court personnel, have the respondent served during the criminal court hearing.

Coordination provided by the staff employed by the Fourth Judicial Circuit Court is critical to the successful functioning of the Domestic Violence Court Docket. Eligible cases are moved at the earliest stages and offenders are held accountable through enhanced structured supervision and monitoring; information is expeditiously extracted from the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office arrest and booking reports and transmitted to the

## Associated Programs: CPDV, InVEST, Batters' Intervention

### Center for Prevention of Domestic Violence (CPDV)

The Center for Prevention of Domestic Violence was created in the late 1990s as a result of a recommendation of the Mayor's Task Force on Domestic Violence. The Mayor's Task Force report revealed that the process for petitioners to get an injunction for protection in Jacksonville was cumbersome and needed to be simplified. It also considered the critical role of safety planning in the injunction process. Injunctions are a very important tool in keeping victims safe, but the service of an injunction and its immediate aftermath can be a particularly dangerous time in the life of a victim of domestic violence. A perpetrator may sometimes choose to escalate violence against his partner and her children when served with an injunction for protection. For this reason, it is necessary that victim advocates be part of the process to safety plan with petitioners and help refer them to appropriate services. For example, in some cases, the victim may need safe shelter for herself and her children while the injunction is being served and for a period of time thereafter.

In response to the Mayor's Task Force recommendations, the State Attorney's Office, the Clerk of Courts, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, the Judiciary, and Hubbard House worked together to create one place where a victim could go to get an injunction for protection, and all the resources, including safety planning with Hubbard House advocates, would be at this central location for that victim.

At CPDV, petitioners first meet with a member of the Clerk's staff who takes their statement and fills out the petition for the judge to sign. They then meet with a Hubbard House victim advocate. Hubbard House advocates at CPDV conduct lethality assessments and safety planning and provide referrals to community resources. Hubbard House victim advocates have a legally privileged relationship under Florida law so they cannot be forced to testify about what a victim tells them, an important component in providing for victim safety as it encourages the victim to be thorough in providing all pertinent information to the advocate.

The Hubbard House advocates assigned to the Domestic Violence Court Docket are housed at the Center for Prevention of Domestic Violence, which provides for enhanced opportunities for cross-training among different advocacy functions and for coordination of service to victims through the different judicial processes.

Hubbard House advocates; and victims are informed in a timely manner of all hearing dates. Victims receive information about court processes, including injunctions and related family law cases, and are referred to a variety of community agencies that can help them with other needs. The procedures enable a victim to have immediate access to victim advocates who are available for safety planning, counseling, and access to a range of social services. Furthermore, procedures are in place that safeguard victims present for hearings; bailiffs notify the Domestic Violence Court Docket partners when victims are present for hearings. Bailiffs then escort victims to a safe, secure waiting area in the courthouse that has been identified for victims to meet with victim advocates before the hearing and to avoid unwanted contact with the offenders.

Technology advances have been an important aspect of the Domestic Violence Court Docket project and have enabled the partners to improve case identification, record keeping, collection of relevant information on all pending cases, and statistical reporting. The project has made use of the Domestic Abuse Information Network (DAIN), a computer program designed to be used for tracking, monitoring, and analyzing law enforcement, court, and offender program records. Additionally, DAIN can generate reports that summarize and analyze domestic violence data that is useful to judges, law enforcement, and service providers. This system is updated daily with pertinent victim and defendant information.

Training has been an important aspect of the Domestic Violence Court Docket from the beginning. Judges, court staff, advocates, police officers, and prosecutors have all participated in trainings relevant to the domestic violence court project. Training has focused on current domestic violence topics, specialty courts, technology, and community collaboration.



### ***Associated Programs: CPDV, InVEST, Batters' Intervention continued***

Another important component of CPDV is military expertise. In 2004, Duval County was selected by the Department of Justice to be one of two demonstration projects to develop and implement coordinated domestic violence services between the military and civilian communities. As part of this process, victim advocates specially trained in working with military-related victims became part of CPDV and procedures were established to provide for closer coordination among the military, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, the civilian courts, and Hubbard House victim advocates. Although funding through the military program has ended, the partners maintain a Memorandum of Understanding to continue the coordination of services. CPDV continues to be a vital community source of expertise in dealing with the complex issues that face military-related victims. This expertise is an important feature of the Domestic Violence Court Docket because of the high number of military families in the community.

### **The Intimate Violence Enhanced Services Team (InVEST)**

InVEST was also created in response to a recommendation from the Mayor's Domestic Violence Task Force report. The Team's mission is to identify and intervene in the most potentially lethal domestic violence cases; its primary goal is to reduce intimate partner domestic violence homicides in Jacksonville. Hubbard House provides an advocate and the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office assigns a detective to the InVEST program. An additional staff support position is provided by the City of Jacksonville Victim Services Center.

All domestic violence police reports and referrals from other agencies are reviewed daily and assessed for potential lethality. An important aspect in the formation of InVEST was agreement by the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office to include a 19 question threat assessment as part of every domestic violence police report. This assessment gives the reviewing team information on not only what happened that day but what has been happening. This same threat assessment is used by other referral sources. Cases identified as high risk for lethality are followed up by advocates and detectives who work together to provide services to victims and accountability to perpetrators. Client participation is completely voluntary and confidential. InVEST clients receive intense case management and advocacy throughout civil and criminal processes until their situation becomes safer or they choose to leave the program. In addition, offenders receive heightened scrutiny by the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office.

### **In-Custody Batterers' Intervention Program**

With funding from the 2008 Arrest Grant, the partners were able to institute an in-custody batterers' intervention program through Hubbard House. This feature was continued by the 2012 Arrest Grant and gives judges the option of ensuring that defendants receive much needed intervention while in custody. Classes are held twice a week so that the 24-week program can be completed during a 90-day sentence. Prior to the in-custody program, incarceration of the offender delayed or prevented altogether the perpetrator completing a batterers' intervention program. Judges can now order the offender to jail and require participation in the jail-based program, followed by completion of a community based program, if the perpetrator has not completed the in-custody program.

## **Learning from the Past, Best Practices and Looking to the Future**

The Domestic Violence Court Docket project has been a critical force in the handling of domestic violence court proceedings in Duval County, with its heightened emphasis on holding offenders accountable and proactively providing victim services. The availability and visibility of victim advocates, prosecutors, police officers, and court staff throughout all stages of proceedings and the open lines of communication among the partner agencies have produced successful and positive results for victims who may once have received uncoordinated responses and inadequate resources prior to the implementation of the Domestic Violence Court Docket.

In addition, the project represents another step in an overall shift in the philosophy of serving victims of domestic violence in the community. Traditionally, in many communities in the United States, services for domestic violence victims were designed to be primarily responsive rather than proactive. Historically, victims became aware of certain services in the community through word of mouth or sometimes through more formal means and then contacted the service provider, often the domestic violence center or the court program for obtaining a protective order. Increasingly, Jacksonville has been in the vanguard of recognizing that to be most effective, systems must be proactive, that they must work vigorously to identify victims and to reach out to them. This proactive approach is the hallmark of the Domestic Violence Court Docket, as well as of the Center for Prevention of Domestic Violence and InVEST.

**The availability and visibility of victim advocates, prosecutors, police officers, and court staff throughout all stages of proceedings and the open lines of communication among the partner agencies have produced successful and positive results for victims ...**

## Best Practices continued



The most important focus for the immediate future is, of course, continuation of the Domestic Violence Court Docket after the end of its primary source of funding, the 2012 Arrest Grant. In both the 2008 and the 2012 funding applications, the partners were asked to address the question of sustainability for the project once OVW funding ended. All of the partners are very experienced in the development of funding requests, and they began to research future resources for the project in its earliest stages. By the time of the 2012 funding application, the Fourth Judicial Circuit Court had already begun the process of implementing plans to take up positions within its current employee allotments. The two positions funded by the 2008 Arrest Grant were transferred to newly vacant positions in the Fourth Judicial Circuit Court's state budget. At the same time, the InVEST positions with Hubbard House and the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office were transferred to non-Arrest Grant sources. As funding from 2012 OVW Arrest Grant comes to an end in June 2015, funding of the remaining Hubbard House advocate positions and the State Attorney's Office positions will be transferred to other sources. One Fourth Judicial Circuit Court case manager position will terminate as no alternative funding source is available. The Domestic Violence Court Docket will continue to operate essentially as it did with Arrest Grant funding in place, minus the case manager whose functions which will be absorbed into other positions for the immediate future. The partners are committed to continue to seek future funding so that all of the important functions of the Domestic Violence Court Docket can continue and be strengthened.

Several issues have been identified as the most significant areas of remaining need: 1) expansion of services to underserved local populations, in particular, elders; victims with limited English language proficiency; and victims who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing or who have a disability; 2) enhanced collaboration and additional training in providing services to victims of domestic violence in military service; 3) development of evaluation and assessment of the model that will assist in providing data to judges and policy makers on compliance with the model and its effectiveness; 4) continued provision of training programs for all partners; 5) continued development of technology; and 6) expanding financial assistance for victims and their families by working with nonprofit and governmental agencies.

As the partners move forward into the next phases of the program, they will be drawing on the successes of the past, adapting and adjusting the program to evolving needs, and continuing to communicate and share relevant expertise among all stakeholders. As ever, the overarching principle that will guide the partners is a continued commitment to sustain and strengthen the community's proactive systems that protect victims of domestic violence and their children and hold perpetrators accountable.

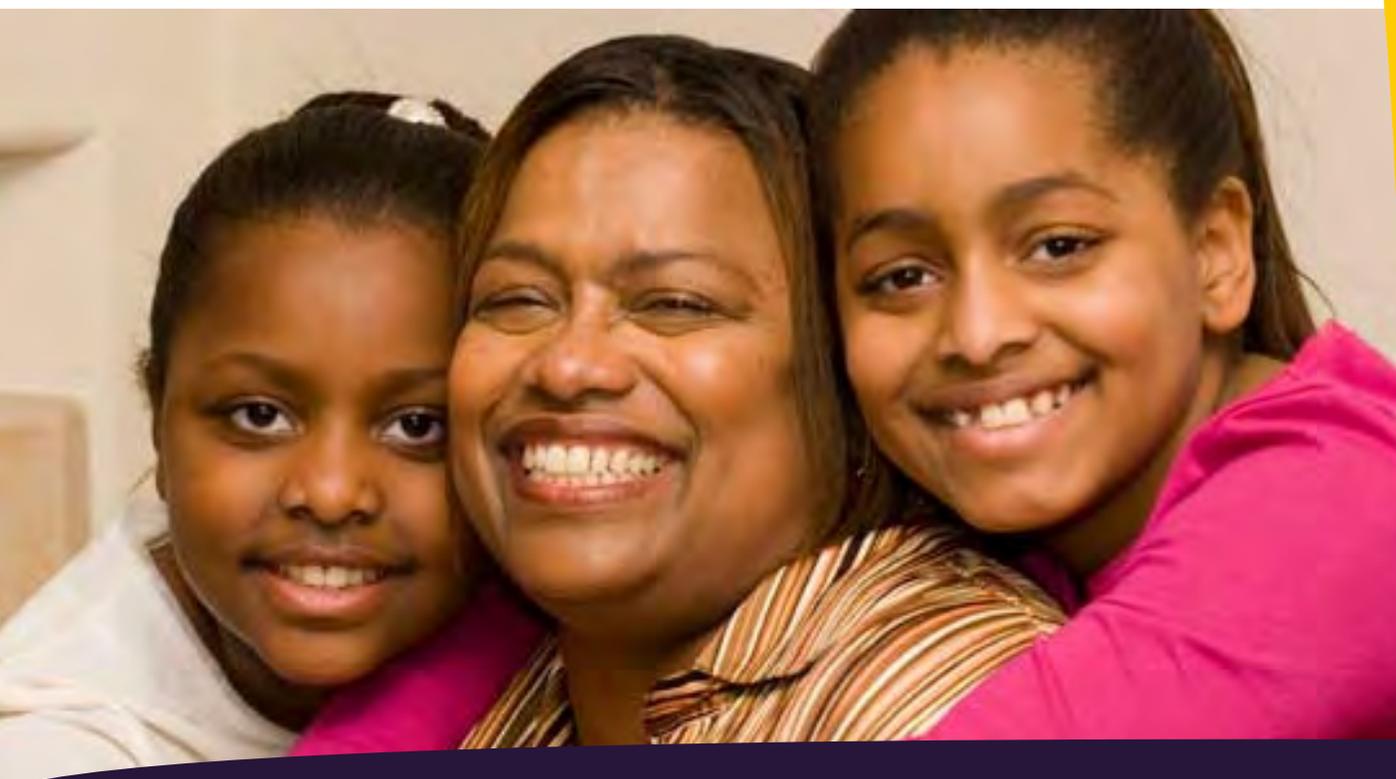
### Partners

City of Jacksonville  
Jacksonville Sheriff's Office  
Hubbard House, Inc.  
Fourth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida  
State Attorney for the Fourth Judicial Circuit of Florida

### Domestic Violence Resources

[Hubbard House](http://www.hubbardhouse.org/domestic-violence/resources/) - www.hubbardhouse.org/domestic-violence/resources/  
[State Attorney's Office](http://www.sao4th.com) - www.sao4th.com  
[City of Jacksonville Social Services Division](http://www.coj.net/departments/parks-recreation/social-services/victims-services.aspx) - www.coj.net/departments/parks-recreation/social-services/victims-services.aspx  
[Fouth Judicial Circuit Family Court](http://www.jud4.org) - www.jud4.org  
[Office on Violence Against Women](http://www.justice.gov/ovw) - www.justice.gov/ovw  
[National Institute of Justice](http://www.nij.gov/Pages/welcome.aspx) - http://www.nij.gov/Pages/welcome.aspx  
[Center for Court Innovation](http://www.courtinnovation.org) - www.courtinnovation.org  
[National Center for State Courts](http://www.ncsc.org) - www.ncsc.org  
[American Bar Association Commission on Domestic and Sexual Violence](http://www.americanbar.org/groups/domestic_violence) - www.americanbar.org/groups/domestic\_violence  
[National Coalition Against Domestic Violence](http://www.ncadv.org) - www.ncadv.org  
[Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence](http://www.fcadv.org) - www.fcadv.org  
[Battered Women's Justice Project](http://www.bwjp.org) - www.bwjp.org  
[Institute on Domestic Violence in The African American Community](http://www.idvaac.org) - www.idvaac.org  
[Futures Without Violence](http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org) - www.futureswithoutviolence.org  
[National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence](http://www.ncdsv.org) - www.ncdsv.org  
[National Network to End Domestic Violence](http://www.nnedv.org) - www.nnedv.org

This project was supported by Grant No. 2008-WE-AX-0031 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations included in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.



# **Strengthening the Judicial Response to Domestic Violence:**

**The Duval County, Florida Experience**

**A Resource for Community Collaboration**