

The Judicial Oversight Demonstration Initiative

PARTNERS

Washtenaw County Trial Court
Ann Arbor Police Department
Washtenaw County Sheriff's
Department
Ypsilanti Police Department
Pittsfield Township Police
Washtenaw County Probation
Department
Washtenaw County Prosecutor's
Office
Ypsilanti Township
Washtenaw County Defense Bar
Domestic Violence Project/
SAFE House
Alternatives to Domestic
Aggression

Background

During fiscal year 1999, Washtenaw County was one of three national demonstration sites selected to participate in the five-year Judicial Oversight Demonstration Initiative (JODI). Funded and managed by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs' Violence Against Women Office and the National Institute of Justice, JODI tests the idea that a coordinated community response to domestic violence that ensures a focused judicial response and a systematic criminal justice response can improve victim safety and increase offender accountability.

Mission

The Washtenaw County Judicial Oversight Demonstration Initiative (JODI) is dedicated to ending domestic violence in Washtenaw County. Its mission is to:

- Maximize the safety of victims and their families
- End community tolerance of domestic violence
- Hold offenders accountable for their violence and abuse
- Ensure fair and equitable treatment in the criminal justice system for persons affected by domestic violence

Collaboration

In its third year of operation, JODI is a community-wide, multidisciplinary effort. Representatives from each partner agency meet monthly to collaboratively review and recommend policy and procedure changes related to JODI. At their bi-weekly meetings, JODI's six-member executive committee reviews recommendations and makes decisions that impact the project.

Each partner agency is involved in the JODI evaluation which is managed by the Site Evaluation Coordinator. The goal is to enhance the project by gaining an understanding of the underlying structures, policies, and procedures that promote and/or impede success. The focus is on the internal workings of each partner agency and on the collaborative effort as a whole.

In an effort to educate community members on domestic violence and JODI, partners agencies established a Public Education Committee which has presented at community forums and other social organizations. In addition, the JODI executive committee has developed and delivered workshops for all JODI employees and team members. Training topics include the dynamics of domestic violence, personal protection orders, interviewing techniques, recognizing self-defense injuries and cultural competency.

In collaboration with the county's technology department, a JODI subcommittee developed a web-application to monitor offenders' compliance with probation and batterer intervention mandates. The application allows judges to view compliance from the bench, probation agents to input and track information, batterer intervention programs to receive referrals and provide compliance updates, and the evaluator to do analysis of individual data.

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JODI Fact Sheet: Washtenaw County

Partners

Judiciary

As a result of JODI, each district court in Washtenaw County established a specialized domestic violence docket in which both victim safety and offender accountability are the top priorities. The dockets follow a protocol that ensures uniform and swift judicial oversight. Schedules are coordinated to ensure that prosecutors, public defenders and probation officers are available for all stages of the process including sentencing and review hearings, and that victim advocates can be in court at all times during domestic violence dockets.

Prosecutor's Office

Five assistant prosecuting attorneys in the Domestic Violence/Homicide Prevention Unit see each case through from beginning to end (vertical prosecution). The prosecutors work closely with the unit investigators and other law enforcement officers to ensure optimal evidence collection so that cases may be prosecuted without the victim present. JODI supports two victim advocates in the prosecutor's office who help victims navigate the criminal justice system and attain appropriate services in the community.

Law Enforcement

Four police departments in Washtenaw County have specialized domestic violence units. The investigator assigned to the prosecutor's office serves the other six agencies. Officers and investigators are trained to understand the dynamics of domestic violence and to properly investigate domestic violence incidents, bond violations and probation violations. Officers provide information at court hearings, trials and sentencing. In addition, they refer domestic violence victims to SAFE House so that advocates may provide information and support.

Probation Department

As a result of JODI, a dedicated DV probation unit evolved. The probation department works closely with the judiciary to monitor the status of domestic violence offenders post conviction. Probation agents review bond conditions with offenders. Agents regularly contact batterer intervention programs to monitor offender attendance and progress and participate in judicial monitoring sessions to help insure probationers' compliance with terms of probation. Agents also regularly talk with victims to assess their safety.

Batterer Intervention

Most judges require offenders to attend batterer intervention programs. Alternatives to Domestic Aggression has a long history of providing services in Washtenaw County. Under JODI, services were expanded to include a short-term batterer's intervention program inside of the Washtenaw County jail where over 25% of inmates are incarcerated for domestic violence related offenses. The program prepares offenders for participation in a more intensive program upon release.

Victim Advocacy

Domestic Violence Project/SAFE House provides extensive services to domestic violence victims in Washtenaw County. SAFE House advocates work closely with law enforcement, probation and victim/witness advocates in the prosecutor's office to attain referrals and to ensure the safety of victims and children. Staff members regularly train JODI partners on issues of domestic violence. Under JODI, SAFE House hired two advocates to assist victims with the legal system and two more advocates to enhance victim autonomy and to assist with restoration.

Defense Bar

Under JODI, the defense bar has actively participated in decision making activities and has played an important role in shaping policies and procedures related to the project. Members were instrumental in the design of the conditional bond release form signed by all defendants at arraignment.