



NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION CENTRE

Building the Evidence – EVALUATION SUMMARIES

2007-ES-6

HOMEFRONT PROJECT

HomeFront was a four-year initiative in Calgary, Alberta. It consisted of a coordinated community response to address the issue of domestic violence. It brought together a number of social services, law enforcement and criminal justice agencies and included the establishment of a specialized Domestic Violence First Appearance Court.

The objective of HomeFront was, and continues to be, a speedier, more integrated justice and community response to domestic violence incidents. HomeFront started as a time-limited project from 2000 to 2004. However, it has now evolved into a stand-alone agency that is sponsored by the United Way of Calgary.



The initial goals of HomeFront were to:

- provide services that promote safety and facilitate the active involvement of victims in the criminal justice system
- hold offenders accountable for their behaviour
- increase accessibility of diverse groups and populations to the justice system
- reduce gaps and avoid duplication of services between the justice system and the community
- increase public confidence in the justice system by providing an immediate and appropriate response to domestic violence

Project assessment

A process and outcome evaluation was conducted. Surveys, interviews and focus groups were used to obtain feedback from stakeholders and service providers such as shelter workers, treatment agency representatives, police and probation officers. In addition, the outcome evaluation used others data sources such as Domestic Court Case Worker and Crown files, incorporating a quasi-experimental design to assess the results of the project.

Twenty-four months following the offenders' appearance in court for a domestic violence offence, data was collected comparing the recidivism rates of offenders who had been convicted prior to and subsequent to the establishment of the specialized Domestic Violence First Appearance Court.

Evaluation findings report on 2,874 individuals during the implementation of the specialized Domestic Violence Court project from May 1st, 2001 and December 31, 2003. As part of the comparison group, baseline data were collected on a sample of 2,478 accused of domestic violence tracked prior to inception of the Court between January 1st, 1998 and April 1st, 1999.

Key findings

The process evaluation revealed that:

- High staff turnover can negatively impact project effectiveness and community collaboration.
- Victim safety should be a paramount consideration for domestic violence projects.
- Speedy access to treatment, as well as retention of offenders in treatment requires adequate resources for probation services, and strong linkages between probation and treatment agencies.
- It is important that linkages are made with Aboriginal communities in order to obtain advice on how best to meet the needs of Aboriginal offenders and victims.
- Efforts by domestic court caseworkers should be made to directly link victims with the services they require.
- It is important that the specialized domestic violence court provides interpretation services and that they have the capacity to meet the needs of diverse ethnic and cultural groups.



The outcome evaluation indicated that:

- Only 12% of accused who went through the specialized domestic violence court re-offended compared to 34% of offenders processed prior to the establishment of the court.
- As a result of the program, there were more domestic violence cases where charges were laid, compared to the sample of cases processed prior to the establishment of the specialized domestic violence court.
- The accused had consistently higher breaches of their probation and Peace Bond conditions. This was attributed to the enforcement of stricter conditions for non-compliance imposed by the project.
- The findings were consistent with research which showed that factors such as unemployment, common-law marital status, low levels of education and prior convictions are associated with reconviction rates among domestic violence offenders.
- The specialized court was successful at providing quick referrals for eligible offenders to batterer treatment programs.
- The length of time between first appearance and disposition in the specialized domestic violence court was shorter and required fewer adjournments than the non-specialized domestic violence court.

Lessons learned

- From the start of the project, there is a need to devote time and attention to evaluation issues, such as having access to data, developing data collection forms and management of the data collection process.
- It is important that the structure of the evaluation report ensures independence and neutrality of the evaluation team.
- The evaluation team must consist of persons with diverse skills such as legal and domestic violence knowledge, writing and interviewing, project management capabilities and expertise in statistical analysis.

Conclusion

The HomeFront Project successfully addressed the issue of domestic violence in the province of Alberta. The provincial government expanded its support for the specialized domestic violence court.

The HomeFront Project evaluation adds to the growing body of knowledge on specialized courts, and in particular, on integrated justice and community responses to prevent recidivism of domestic violence cases.

For more information or to receive a copy of the final evaluation report please contact the National Crime Prevention Centre at 1-877-302-6272 or visit our website at: www.publicsafety.gc.ca/ncpc

For more information on the HomeFront organization that resulted from this project, visit www.homefrontcalgary.com.