



Montgomery County Family Justice Center

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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

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FOUNDATION
BENEFIT
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From the Desk of Director Uma Ahluwalia, DHHS

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Although many strides have been made to prevent or reduce the incidence of domestic violence, it remains one of the nation's most challenging problems. The statistics are still startling. One in every four women will experience abuse and children are 1,500 times more likely to be abused in these homes. Over the past 20 years, 1,500 people in the State of Maryland have died as a result of domestic violence. Domestic Violence Awareness Month is a time to both celebrate our accomplishments and to re-dedicate ourselves and our resources to ending domestic violence and helping those who have been affected to heal.

October is also the 18 month mark for the Montgomery County Family Justice Center (FJC). There was an amazing celebration on Sunday, October 3 to acknowledge the wonderful work of the FJC and the many staff and collaborators who make the FJC a success. Since opening, the Center has successfully pulled together a partnership between the criminal justice and human services systems that makes it easier for victims to quickly get the help and support they need. Over 2,100 persons have come through the door seeking and receiving help. Most recently, a young woman came into the FJC with her child and their belongings in tow, after a night of violence. The staff at the Center quickly got her things stored, her child fed and put a safety plan in place. She com-

mented, "If I knew this place existed, I would have left a long time ago." Happily her experience with the FJC is not uncommon. Her words speak to both the success of the Center and the need to make the public even more aware of its existence.

As Director of the Department of Health and Human



The Montgomery County Family Justice Center is centrally located in the heart of Rockville, Maryland.

Services (DHHS), I have been pleased to be a partner in the FJC, together with the Office of the Sheriff and the Office of the State's Attorney. Our Abused Persons Program (APP) staff, assigned to work in the FJC, has found that co-location makes for easy and effective coordination, not only with the State's Attorney's Office and the Sheriff's Office, but with the attorneys and counselors from the House of Ruth and Catholic Charities. And the pastoral care services through Interfaith Community Against Domestic Violence have helped to create a space for the healing to begin as people walk through the door.

During the last year, there has been an increase of 20% of the victims of domestic violence who are seeking services from HHS. Our staff attribute this in part to the work of the FJC. I,

and the staff at APP find this progress professionally gratifying. The increased access to domestic violence services has helped to assure that victims' needs will be addressed comprehensively from both a criminal justice and human services perspective. This is truly a model of what can be accomplished when local government and the private sector work together collaboratively.

The services available at the FJC, together with those that are part of the larger network in the community, provide domestic violence victims with a full range of support. At the FJC, clients can receive immediate services such as advocacy which includes educating clients about their legal options or accompanying clients to court, emergency shelter, and crisis counseling. In addition, referrals to any of the services provided by HHS are routinely made. These include referrals to child welfare services, health care, child care, housing, income supports, and emergency services. Referrals are coordinated with community partners for services such as therapy for children who have witnessed domestic violence.

Clearly the work of the FJC is just beginning. We have a long way to go and far too many families will need our help in the coming years. I am proud of the accomplishments to date and even more proud of the staff who have worked so hard to make life safer for the families and children of Montgomery County. Let's keep pushing forward!



Tim Hagan
Assistant State's
Attorney &
Contributing Writer



From L to R, Assistant
State's Attorneys, **Jes-
sica Hall and Patrick
Mays** with intern, **Tal-
hia Tuck.**



From L to R State's
Attorney's Office
Staff, **Karla Smith,**
Chief of the Family
Violence Division,
Nicole Brito, Legal
Assistant & **Christina
Miles,** Director of
the Family Violence
Division.

As the SOTD A Prosecutor's Day is Different from the Norm

I arrive at the Family Justice Center (FJC) building minutes before 8:30 am. My current assignment, prosecuting misdemeanor domestic violence, has me in one court or another every day. Most days, my job is more like a baseball closer; many things need to go right for me to be in a position to help. The real grunt work, the work that changes victims' lives, usually occurs well before I ever get involved. Ensuring a victim's safety is paramount to any successful prosecution. That is the daily work that takes place at the FJC. The work at the FJC aids the victim in realizing her power to stop the abuse by helping her to become autonomous and to determine the means and options for ending the cycle of violence that has been devastating her life.

Today I have the opportunity to encounter the victims as they first walk through the FJC doors. I am the State's Attorney of the Day (SOTD). Today is different. The SOTD assignment is unique. The SOTD's role is to take on all comers seeking guidance that, in theory, only prosecutors can dispense. I am the

face of the State's Attorney's Office for the day.

Prosecutors are not desk-types. But as SOTD it is essential that I can be located anytime through 5pm. Some days being chained to my desk means I can catch up on work. Most days it means that people can track me down which is not always a good thing. Did I mention that prosecutors are not desk-types? But today, unlike other days, I want to be found.

As the morning progresses, calls come in from police, attorneys, victims and concerned citizens. The calls are not frequent – most calls are handled and diverted by our staff and legal assistants, putting people in touch with the appropriate services (police, protective orders, shelter, etc.). However, as the attorney on duty, I also handle the walk ins. The walk ins at the FJC present a myriad of complex issues. Many times, for these victims, the most pressing issue to them is not how to stop their abuse. It is where they will sleep tonight, how they will feed their children, how long the ten dollars in their pocket

will last, and how they will be able to support their family. Every minute I speak with these victims, I must be mindful of that. It is not and cannot just be about prosecuting their abuser. These are often victims who are finally coming for help after years of abuse. I am one of the first people to whom they are speaking about prosecution, about escape, about accountability. I am speaking to them without the luxury of hours of police investigation, legal research and case review. I have only their words, spoken through tears among crying children and chaotic memories. From this, I have to discern whether I am able to put forward a case that will withstand our justice system. And so my work begins.

The day will end after returning from bond hearings with my voicemail full of messages, a full inbox, and lingering doubts about judgment calls and referrals. All I can do is hope that I truly listened and heard the ones who needed help and that their involvement at the FJC will give them the strength to stop the violence and to help me hold their abusers accountable.

Choose Respect Montgomery Save the Date

The Domestic Violence Coordinating Council in collaboration with other County agencies and organizations is planning the 2nd Annual Choose Respect Montgomery Teen Dating Conference. The conference will take place on Saturday April 9, 2011 at the Takoma Park

Campus of Montgomery College.

Workshops for teens in 7th thru 12th grades and their parents will be available and held in Spanish and English. Workshops will focus on topics related to teen dating violence, healthy relationship behaviors and abuse through technology.

City at Peace DC will open the program with a follow-up

performance from last year. Complimentary lunch and raffles prizes will also be available during the event.

The teen dating public service announcement (PSA) contest will be held in conjunction with the conference again this year with the winning PSA revealed during the day's events.

Please stay tuned for all the details!

The Role of the LOTD



*Beth Landau
Legal Assistant
Contributing Writer*

In the early hours of the morning, the responsibilities of a domestic violence legal assistant (LOTD) within the State’s Attorney’s office have already begun. The first stop is the “Jail Run” at the

Montgomery County Detention Center in Rockville to review the domestic violence arrests from the previous night. The LOTD will make a notation in the file to assure the case is set on the Domestic Violence court docket and flag additional cases of concern. The Jail Run is also used to gather as much history as possible on the offenders who are going before the judge for a bond review that afternoon.

The LOTD will bring copies of the new arrests to the FJC “roll call,” an inter-agency briefing conducted every morning among all of the agencies co-located at the FJC.

During this meeting, each agency shares additional information about offenders and victims. The team will discuss the needs of the victims and their safety, whether a victim and an alleged offender have a previous history of violence, and determine the steps that the team will take to ensure the safety of the victim as well as that of the community.

Throughout the day, a Legal



Legal Assistants from the Montgomery County State's Attorney's Office

Assistant assists in filtering a high volume of phone calls. Many times the LOTD will be contacted by a victim in a pending case and will relay the bond conditions of their alleged offender. On a

weekly basis, the Domestic Violence unit has a team meeting for a case review as well as to discuss important information pertaining to the unit.

During the course of the day the LOTD is investigating pending cases for trial. Case preparation consists of speaking with victims over the phone or at the FJC and gathering evidence. This could require documenting a victim’s injuries by taking photographs that will be used during the trial and collecting any pertinent evidence with regard to these cases. Additional evidence varies but may consist of certified medical and phone records, 911 calls, photographs, and police reports. Trial dates are typically set within thirty days of an offender’s arrest, therefore, evidence must be gathered immediately. All of this is used when the LOTD arrives in court to assist with the criminal domestic violence court docket. This is the time when the case goes to trial.

College Internship Program Launches at the FJC

With the start of the academic year in September, the Montgomery County Sheriff’s Office launched a new internship program at the Family Justice Center, in cooperation with the University of Maryland. Ms. Zulma Medrano, a Family Science major at the University’s College Park campus, was selected as the program’s first intern, and she has become an integral member of the FJC team. As an intern, Zulma receives training and supervision from FJC staff and works directly with FJC clients, providing victims of domestic violence with personalized safety planning and preparing petitions for orders of protection. A fluent Spanish-speaker, Zulma has also reached

out by phone to communicate with victims of domestic violence who have obtained interim protective orders during the FJC’s off-hours, encouraging them to visit the FJC for supportive services. Zulma has successfully advocated for one of her clients at an inter-agency gathering designed to coordinate wrap-around services for victims across state and local agencies. In addition to building invaluable experience in her future career field, Zulma will receive academic credit for her efforts and training at the FJC. FJC staff and clients have been delighted with the work of our first intern and look forward to welcoming future students to the program.



Zulma Medrano, at the FJC conducts phone outreach to domestic violence victims.



Family Justice Center Foundation News

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Foundation President's Welcome



*Resa Levy
FJC Foundation
President*

It was an almost un-attainable goal – to host the 1st Annual MCFJC Foundation Benefit just a little more than one year after the MCFJC opened its doors. But thanks to you – the more than 250 sponsors, donors and supporters, we did it!

The event, chaired by the incomparable Catherine Leggett, with support from a dedicated, hard working committee, was a resounding success. The evening began with a reception and silent auction where guests had the opportunity to place their bids on dinners, shows, trips, gems, jewels and other fabulous items, while they networked with friends and colleagues.

Ms. Leggett then welcomed everyone to the program portion of the evening, citing the more than a dozen elected officials and special guests in attendance. We viewed the first-ever showing of the MCFJC Foundation video, were inspired by remarks from 1st Lady of Maryland, Judge Catherine O'Malley, enjoyed a live auction, witnessed an incredibly moving survivor speak out, and participated in a special rally to help support the Safe Start program for children who come to the Center needing psychological services.

Awards were presented to several honorees. Vice President Joseph R. Biden was the recipient of the Forerunner

Award. Accepting on his behalf was Advisory Board Member, the Honorable Connie Morella, one of the founders of the movement to end domestic violence.

The Foundation, wishing to acknowledge both the critical role that County Councilmember Duchy Trachtenberg played in establishing the MCFJC, as well as her years' long effort to see it to its successful opening, presented her with the Marilyn J. Praisner Founders Award.

Michael Maiorana, Regional President for Verizon Wireless in Washington-Baltimore-Virginia, accepted the Corporate Legacy Award on behalf of Verizon Wireless. It was their initial support that helped launch the MCFJC Foundation. Melanie Ortel, a senior member of the Verizon Wireless team said in part, "The Montgomery County Family Justice Center's groundbreaking approach to serving victims as they navigate the process of recovery is a model for jurisdictions throughout Maryland and beyond."

I wish to thank Catherine and her committee for having selected me for the Inspiring Leader Award. It has been my great pleasure to serve as Founding President of the MCFJC Foundation, to work with an outstanding board, and to be a part of a wonderful effort to help eliminate domestic violence and partner abuse in Montgomery County.

Thank you to each and every donor, sponsor and supporter, for making the 1st Annual MCFJC Foundation Benefit such a resounding success. We couldn't have done it without you.

The Business Initiative Seeks to Build a Safer and Healthier Community

The MCFJC Foundation's Business Initiative is currently being launched, and we are actively seeking business people and employers who wish to discuss ways in which they might help raise awareness about the issues surrounding domestic violence and partner abuse, and how it impacts both employers and employees in the workforce.

Co-chairing the effort are Board Members David Belkin and Lewis Selis. According to Selis, a long-time business owner in the community, "We are hosting our first meeting in November as a kick-off for new ideas from the

business community...we look forward to adding other business leaders in the effort to promote our cause." Belkin agrees, "The Family Justice Center helps to make the community healthier and safer, and by joining in the Business Initiative you will be part of the effort."

The mission of the Montgomery County Family Justice Center is to provide support for the Montgomery County Family Justice Center. Since the Center opened a little more than a year ago, more than 2100 clients have sought services. Many of those clients are currently in the work-

force.

If you agree that this is a workplace as well as an individual and societal issue, and if you would like to be a part of the effort to help eliminate domestic violence in our County, or perhaps you'd like to learn more to see whether or not this is something in which you would like to become involved, please email us at mcfjcfoundation@yahoo.com. To read more about the Foundation, visit us at www.mcfjcfoundation.org.

Small Commitments Leads to Great Rewards



Donna Rismiller
Contributing Writer

Families suffering from violence in their homes face many challenges. One of the most daunting can be navigating the court system, from emergency orders to criminal hearings to permanent custody and divorce issues. The prospect of battling through a legal system can be so intimidating and overwhelming that too many of our county residents choose to stay in violent homes rather than face the risks.

The Lawyers' Initiative was designed to help families in need take on the challenges of the court process with capable and confident legal counsel by their side. Many of our attorneys have learned the value of their services by joining a family in need to take the legal process step by step. Here is what one generous attorney had to say about his recent experience helping a young mother and her children:

"While this particular case ended up not taking a huge commitment, it was extremely gratifying to be able to help an abused person who otherwise did not have the resources to be able to help herself. For me, this one case demonstrated the value of the Family Justice Center and what it

was intended to do: aid abused persons in their judicial needs and bring about an outcome that would allow them to rid themselves of their abusers when they lacked the ability to do so on their own. Because of the efforts of the FJC, and the associated services, such as Safe Start Kids, more and more people, especially women and children, have found a safe haven in which they can move on with their lives, fear free."

Mike Subin, Esq.
The Subin Group

Lawyers like Mike Subin continue to play a valuable role in providing access to legal help that would not otherwise be available to families in need. The commitment is small but the rewards are great.

As the head of the Lawyers' Initiative for the Family Justice Center Foundation, I am always interested to hear from other attorneys who want to use their skills to help create safe homes for our county residents. For more information on how to pledge legal help for survivors in our county, please send an email to DRismiller@RismillerLaw.com.

Donna K. Rismiller, Esq.
Lawyers' Initiative Chair
Family Justice Center Foundation, Inc.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY
FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER

The Montgomery County Family Justice Center Foundation 1st Annual Benefit October 3, 2010



Resa Levy, Recipient of the Inspiring Leader Award with Catherine Leggett, Catherine Curran-O'Malley and Ike Leggett.



Councilmember Duchy Trachtenberg recipient of the Marilyn J. Praisner Founders Award, pictured with Ike and Catherine Leggett, Allison Praisner-Klump, Lee Klump and Catherine Curran-O'Malley.



Michael Maiorana, Regional President, accepted the Corporate Legacy Award on behalf of Verizon Wireless Foundation. Pictured with Catherine Leggett, Catherine Curran-O'Malley and Ike Leggett.



Suzanne and Darren Popkin

" We know that the most effective way to prevent family violence and to respond to it is through a coordinated and comprehensive community effort. That concisely describes what the Montgomery County Family Justice Center is. The FJC provides a refuge; creates empowerment; offers hope; and reaffirms how the human spirit triumphs, with a little help from our friends. "
Councilmember Duchy Trachtenberg



Chelsea Hayes



Catherine Curran-O'Malley, Ida Ruben and Catherine Leggett



Dr. David Borenstein and Dorothy Fait



Susan Lee, Douglas Gansler and Chung Pak



Martha and Bruce Sherman



John McCarthy



Marc Elrich and Barbara Goldberg-Goldman

Special Thanks to the Following New and Continuing MCFJC Foundation Sponsors

Thank you to our wonderful donors!

It is through your gifts that we are able to provide the social, legal, psychological and protective services necessary to rebuild the lives of the women, children and families who have survived domestic and relationship abuse.

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Darren and Suzanne Popkin

Kelly Price

**We wish to sincerely thank all those
who supported our Silent Auction, Live
Auction and Rally for the Children.**

Marilyn and Tom Bagel

Ashlie Bagwell

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David & Ellen Belkin

Marielsa Bernard

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Safe Start, Helping Child Witnesses of Domestic Violence Heal

Domestic violence can have profound effects on children. Many children can experience psychological effects as well as disruptions to their family life as a result of domestic violence. Some experience frequent nightmares, fears, or are even afraid to return to their own homes.

The Safe Start Program is a counseling program administered by the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office for children ages 3 through 17 years old who have been exposed to domestic violence. Therapy services are offered in Spanish and in French as well. Therapists work with children to assist them in dealing with issues related to domestic violence such as trauma, anxiety, depression, anger, conflict resolution, self esteem and guilt. Children learn about safety planning, coping skills, positive communication and positive behaviors. The program receives ap-

proximately 300 referrals each year from County agencies and schools.

Children also receive the benefit of social support from the Safe Start Kids Groups. These groups involve a 12 week program designed specifically for children exposed to domestic violence. The program employs techniques such as talk, play and art therapies. Participants share feelings and experiences to foster the healing process. Children are comforted by knowing that they are safe and that others care about their families. We take great pride in seeing how families can overcome the tragedy of domestic violence.

Additionally, on behalf of the children in the Safe Start Program, we would like to thank the Family Justice Center Foundation and donors for their program sponsorship at this year's Annual Benefit. **THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!**



Featured on this page are drawings by children enrolled in the Safe Start Program. The artwork illustrates their feelings and perceptions about the violence they are experiencing in their homes.

We're on the Web:
www.montgomerycountymd.gov/fjc & www.mcfjcfoundation.org

Giving Campaign

Employees wishing to contribute to the FJC Foundation may do so through Montgomery Alliance. Select M300 Family Justice Center Foundation in Montgomery County's giving campaign.

<https://www.charities.org/montgomerycounty>

FJC Update:
Since the Grand Opening 2100 domestic violence clients representing 100 different countries of origin have received services at the FJC.



Left— MCSO Sergeants Baxter and Toole consult on the service of a Protective Order.



Below— APP Staff and Sheriff's Office Victim Assistants collaborate on a victim's case.