



# The Domestic Violence Intervention Workgroup Project

Chief Kevin Jowitt<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *In this piece, Chief Kevin Jowitt of Noblesville Police Department shares his experiences in working with a group of IUPUI SPEA graduate students for their final Capstone project.*

Indiana University's School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA) Graduate Program Capstone projects are much more than a way to measure student progress in the areas the program covers - they are useful projects that help clients accomplish real-world objectives.

Hamilton County criminal justice agencies have long attempted to deal with the problem of domestic violence. Our practices since the early 1990s have been guided by an evidence-based prosecution model which recognizes that the victim of domestic abuse often cannot or will not assist in the follow-up necessary to ensure the successful prosecution of his or her abuser. In evaluating proposed new domestic violence initiatives in 2010 and 2011, we realized that we had no meaningful data with which to measure our success or to understand where problems in our approach existed. We also realized that the model we had been using was based on research that was twenty years old, and we had not kept abreast of new research or best practice models since we adopted the evidence-based prosecution approach.

We knew that both of these issues could be addressed by a research project. We also knew that we did not have the available resources to engage in this project, particularly in the collection of large amounts of data from the multiple independent data systems involved.

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<sup>1</sup> Noblesville, Indiana, Chief of Police

In January 2012, we proposed a Capstone project to the IUPUI SPEA V-600 class to conduct this research. We specifically wanted to know how the way we handled domestic violence cases—from the point of first contact to the point of final resolution—impacted the incidence of repeat offenses and how we could change our practices to reduce offender recidivism. We were fortunate to have been selected as a project by a group and were extremely impressed with their work.

The Domestic Violence Intervention Workgroup (DVIW), as the Capstone group was known, faced a significant challenge in compiling and analyzing data. To follow a domestic violence case through the system from initial report to resolution, data had to be collected from two separate police records management systems, in addition to the system used by the Hamilton County Prosecutor's Office, the system used by the courts, the system used by the Division of Child Services, and the system used by Prevail, a victim advocacy agency. As these systems do not communicate with each other, each case had to be independently tracked through each system to properly determine the resolution and the cases were then cross-checked to determine repeat victim/offender sets.

The DVIW project effectively compiled and analyzed the data and gave us the first comprehensive look we have ever had at the outcomes of our handling of these cases. The opportunity to assess the effectiveness of our domestic violence case handling across the system allows us to see what does and does not work and suggests areas where improvements can be made.

The best practice research, when coupled with what we learned about ourselves from the data analysis, suggested several programs we needed to look at as a way of improving our long-term outcomes. In addition to several recommendations about improving training and communications between agencies, the group provided valuable ideas about data systems to better track cases across the spectrum of criminal justice agencies—a system to track indicator crimes to take a more proactive approach to domestic violence. They also suggested strengthening and re-focusing the existing domestic violence task force to take a more proactive role in the investigation of domestic violence cases.

We are using the DVIW Project as a basis for moving forward in the handling of domestic abuse cases in Hamilton County. It will be the cornerstone of our current evaluation for the establishment of a domestic violence shelter in Hamilton County and to determine need for ancillary services not currently offered by social service providers. The project is also being used as a blueprint for a workgroup to revise criminal justice practices to achieve more positive results in preventing repeated domestic abuse cases.

The value of the DVIW Project cannot be understated. It put together information we did not have the time or resources to assemble and allowed us to examine our own work and roles in these cases like never before. The project will ultimately make a positive difference in many people's lives and in the way we handle cases as we move forward.