

City of Chicago

**Safe Havens: Supervised Visitation and Safe
Exchange Grant Program**

National Demonstration Initiative

Final Report

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City of Chicago Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence
Leslie Landis, Director
333 S. State Street, Suite #550
Chicago, IL 60604
(312) 747-9972
www.cityofchicago.org/domesticviolence

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I. Introduction

In 2002, the City of Chicago Department of Human Services (CDHS), on behalf of the Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence (MODV), submitted a grant application to the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) under the Safe Havens: Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant program. The grant provided an opportunity for units of local, state, and tribal governments to apply for funding to deliver supervised visitation and safe exchange services to families with a history of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, and child abuse, with visits or exchanges taking place between parents. Chicago was chosen as one of four national demonstration sites. Also chosen as demonstration sites were: Santa Clara County, California (the Bay area), the State of Michigan, and Kent, Washington.

Upon receipt of Safe Havens funding in 2002, the City of Chicago entered into contracts with three supervised visitation and safe exchange centers: Apna Ghar, The Branch Family Institute (Branch), and Mujeres Latinas en Acción (Mujeres). A brief description of these three centers is below:

Apna Ghar (Our Home) is located in the culturally diverse north side of Chicago, and was founded in 1989. Apna Ghar was the first transitional shelter and social service program serving Asian victims of domestic violence in the nation. Although this program provides services to women and children of all ethnic backgrounds, Apna Ghar has developed a comprehensive program that meets the expressed need for cultural services for women and children from the Asian Subcontinent countries of India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka. In 1991, Apna Ghar established the Supervised Child Visitation Center, which provides both supervised visitation and safe exchange services to families with a history of domestic violence.

All services provided by Apna Ghar, including those offered through the Supervised Child Visitation Center, are free of charge.

The Branch Family Institute (Branch) is a subsidiary of E.M. Branch and Associates, Inc., a counseling agency founded in 2001 to provide culturally competent clinical services to low-income and traditionally underserved families. Located on the south side of Chicago, Branch began providing supervised visitation and safe exchange services to residents when the only existing south side visitation and exchange program closed its doors in 2002. Through the Branch Family Institute, Chicago residents on the south side of Chicago, as well as throughout the rest of the metropolitan area, are able to receive culturally sensitive and respectful supervised visitation and safe exchange services free of charge.

Mujeres Latinas en Acción (Mujeres) provides comprehensive domestic violence and sexual assault services to the Latino community in Chicago. Located in the west side of Chicago, Mujeres was founded in 1973 and is one of the longest operating Latina nonprofit organizations in the nation. Mujeres began offering free supervised visitation services to Chicago residents in January 2002. Their supervised visitation center is the only program in the city, which has Spanish-speaking bilingual and bicultural staff/volunteers supervising the visits and exchanges.

Under the Safe Havens initiative, all grantees were required to: enhance their capacity to deliver domestic violence-informed supervised visitation and safe exchange services, increase safety and security measures within their programs, and develop collaborative relationships with their local courts and domestic violence advocacy community. Chicago and the other

demonstration sites were also charged with working individually and collaboratively to examine their current service practices, policies, and protocols through the lens of victim and child safety. Special technical assistance was provided to the four demonstration sites to help facilitate this process, and the outcome was the development of guiding principals and promising practices for supervised visitation and safe exchange programs.

Chicago was well positioned to receive Safe Havens funding since the three partnering community-based supervised visitation and exchange programs were already operating and being partially funded through the Chicago Department of Human Services prior to the award of federal funds in 2002. Additionally, Chicago represents an extremely ethnically and racially diverse urban environment, which presents unique challenges and considerations when delivering supervised visitation and safe exchange services. The existing visitation centers also had extensive experience providing services to families from diverse backgrounds. Finally, local collaborative relationships between the three visitation centers, the City, the courts, and the domestic violence service community were already in the early stages of development, which helped guarantee local support for the project. The award of federal funds, however, allowed Chicago to build upon these pre-existing factors, and successfully increase the city's capacity to provide domestic violence-informed visitation and exchange services.

II. The Chicago Safe Havens Collaborative

Upon receipt of Safe Havens funding, Chicago immediately established two local work groups, which would help facilitate the implementation of the proposed and required grant activities. These two groups were referred to as the Local Partners Work Group and the Local

Consulting Committee. Together, these two groups formed the Chicago Safe Havens Collaborative.

Local Partners Work Group

Members of the Local Partners Work Group consisted of the City of Chicago Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence, the Chicago Department of Human Services, the Illinois Criminal Justice Authority, and the three supervised visitation and safe exchange centers contracted to provide services to victims and their children in Chicago.

The City of Chicago Mayor's Office on Domestic (MODV)¹ served as the Project Director for the Chicago Safe Havens Demonstration Grant Initiative. In this capacity, MODV oversaw the implementation of all grant-related activities and was the primary liaison between the City and the Office on Violence Against Women. The Chicago Department of Human Services (CDHS) was the fiscal agent for this grant, and conducted the program, fiscal and contractual monitoring for the three collaborating visitation centers. The Illinois Criminal Justice Authority (ICJIA) served as the local evaluator for the Chicago Safe Havens initiative, which was a requirement for all demonstration site grantees. The three contracting supervised visitation centers (Apna Ghar, The Branch Family Institute, and Mujeres Latinas en Acción), were responsible for providing the direct supervised visitation and safe exchange services to families impacted by domestic violence.

The Local Partners Work Group met monthly over the four years of federal funding, and worked to: implement the required grant activities, assess local program practices, and discuss emerging issues impacting victims of domestic violence and their children.

¹ The City of Chicago Mayor's Office on Domestic (MODV) is charged with overseeing Chicago's comprehensive effort to address domestic violence. MODV strives to raise community awareness, develop effective public policy, and create efficient pathways to service.

Local Consulting Committee

In addition to the Local Partners Work Group, the Safe Havens Grant initiative also required that all grantees establish a multi-disciplinary advisory group, referred to as the Local Consulting Committee (LCC). This larger group met quarterly and was comprised of representatives from many of the systems victims of domestic violence and their children encounter during the post-separation period. Quarterly meetings were spent addressing emerging trends, creating a strategic plan for the initiative, and developing standards of information sharing between the local courts and the three visitation centers.

The Chicago Local Consulting Committee consists of members from a wide variety of city, county, and state government agencies, as well as nonprofit organizations. These agencies and organizations include: the Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence, the Chicago Department of Human Services, the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, Apna Ghar, The Branch Family Institute, Mujeres Latinas en Acción, the Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women's Network, the Chicago Police Department, the Chicago Department of Public Health, the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, the Cook County Circuit Courts Domestic Relations Division, the Cook County Courts Marriage and Family Counseling Division, the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services, Life Span (legal services and a Legal Assistance for Victims grantee), the YWCA Rise Children's Sexual Assault Program, La Familia Unida (batterer's intervention program), and the Domestic Violence Mental Health Policy Initiative.

III. An Overview of the Chicago Safe Havens Project Goals and Accomplishments

Goals

In the Safe Havens grant application, the City of Chicago identified the following project goals:

- Expand Chicago’s capacity to provide comprehensive supervised visitation and safe exchange services to underserved victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and stalking;
- Provide supervised visitation and safe exchange services to approximately 250 families in Chicago;
- Provide safe and victim-sensitive visitation and exchange services that promote abuser accountability;
- Establish service standards by which visitation and exchanges will occur;
- Enhance Chicago’s capacity to more effectively participate in the National Demonstration project by hiring a Project Coordinator to assist with the implementation of the local and national activities required of the demonstration sites; and
- Examine how Chicago can improve service delivery to victims of domestic violence in general, and to families from diverse communities in particular.

As the Chicago Safe Havens initiative moved forward, the collaborative identified two additional goals for the project. These included working to incorporate supervised visitation and safe exchange services into the continuum of the city’s coordinated response to domestic violence, and identifying ongoing and more permanent sources of funding to ensure that visitation and exchange services in Chicago are sustained after federal funds end.

Accomplishments

Over the course of the Safe Havens grant initiative, the Chicago local collaborative was able to successfully accomplish each of these projected goals. Some highlights of these accomplishments include:

Increased Service Capacity

Receipt of the Safe Havens grant and participation in the national demonstration project enhanced Chicago's capacity to provide safe and domestic violence-informed visitation and exchange services to victims of domestic violence and their children.

Prior to receiving Safe Havens funding, each of Chicago's supervised visitation centers had existing visitation programs funded primarily by Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) administered through the Chicago Department of Human Services. The addition of federal Safe Havens funds, however, allowed Apna Ghar, Branch and Mujeres to secure additional program space and increase staffing, both of which enabled them to more than double the number of visitation and exchange services provided to clients. Specifically, Apna Ghar and Branch were able to add staff and pay rent for an additional supervised visitation room, and Mujeres was able to increase staffing and begin offering safe exchanges. This increase in service capacity was a significant achievement of the Chicago Safe Havens grant.

Provided Services to Over 250 Families

Over the four years of the demonstration project, Safe Havens funding enabled Chicago's three supervised visitation centers to serve 571 families.² The three visitation centers also

² This is a duplicate number.

provided a total of 4,970 supervised visits and 2,569 safe exchanges to families impacted by domestic violence.

Provided Safe and Victim-Centered Visitation and Exchange Services

Chicago's three partnering supervised visitation centers have always been committed to providing a safe and secure environment for supervised visitation and safe exchange services for families who have experienced domestic violence. Security measures that were in place at the centers before the Safe Havens project began included staggered arrival and departure times, separate waiting rooms for the custodial and non-custodial parents, and separate entrances and parking areas for the custodial and non-custodial parents.

In order to best address the safety needs of the victims and children utilizing their programs, however, each of the supervised visitation centers used Safe Havens funds to enhance their existing security measures. For example, Apna Ghar purchased two-way radios for increased staff communication and added panic buttons to their visitation rooms. Branch also added panic buttons to their visitation rooms and installed a doorbell to their front door to control the flow of clients. Mujeres added panic buttons to the visitation rooms and began to utilize cell phones to increase communication between staff while facilitating visits.

All three visitation centers also carefully reviewed current center practices and policies, and made revisions to enhance the safety and security of their clients. For example, Apna Ghar began escorting the victim and child(ren) to and from their vehicle or public transportation if there was concern about unwanted contact with the abusive parent while entering or exiting the building. Branch established cell phone safety measures such as calling the victim parent to alert them when the abusive parent arrived at the center. Branch also implemented a bathroom policy

whereby staff escort children under the age of 5 years to the bathroom with custodial parent permission. Mujeres created intake questions specifically related to the client's method of transportation to assess any safety risks to the victim. This assessment is especially important when both parents use public transportation to attend visits/exchanges. Mujeres also created a safety log, which allows the visitation center staff to share information with each other about any incidents that occurred at the center or concerns expressed by the victim parent.

Finally, each of the three visitation centers implemented a routine practice of checking in with the victim parents before each visit/exchange. This new practice creates an opportunity for visitation center staff to hear about concerns or issues related to the services received, or learn about any incidents that might have occurred between the visits/exchanges. In addition to enhancing safety, this practice has also helped the visitation centers become more victim-centered in their approach to service delivery.

Established Service Standards

In addition to the new and enhanced safety and security practices mentioned above, Chicago's three visitation centers also implemented new program practices and policies, which helped to enhance the delivery of supervised visitation and safe exchange services. These new practices include the implementation of a conversational approach to the intake process, the re-examination of current documentation practices, the implementation of routine check-ins with victim parents, and the utilization of a standard form when making reports to the courts. Each of these new program practices will be described in more detail in a later section of this report.

Additionally, the three visitation centers helped to inform the 'Guiding Principals of the Safe Havens: Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant Program' report released by the Office on Violence Against Women in 2008. These guiding principals identify certain threshold

standards for visitation programs. Detailed information on how the Chicago visitation centers implement and practice these guiding principals will be outlined later in this report.

Fully Participated in the National Demonstration Initiative

In 2005, the City of Chicago Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence was able to use Safe Havens funding to hire a full-time Project Coordinator. This position was dedicated to implementing all aspects of Chicago's demonstration initiative.

Improved Service Delivery to Victims of Domestic Violence and Families from Diverse

Backgrounds

As a demonstration site grantee, Chicago was required to participate in both a national and local evaluation. The national evaluation was conducted by researchers from the University of Michigan, and the local evaluation was conducted by researchers from the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority. For both evaluations, client-level data was collected and program staff were interviewed. The local and national evaluations provided the Chicago partners with essential information on key issues such as client perceptions of safety, important cultural considerations for supervised visitation centers, and local judicial attitudes on ordering supervised visits and/or safe exchanges.

Preliminary information from these evaluations is both informative and affirming. Many of the victims interviewed indicated that the services they received through the Chicago supervised visitation programs provided them and their children with a sense of safety and security. Supervised visitation center staff also indicated that participating in the Safe Havens initiative greatly enhanced the services offered through their programs. The information obtained through

the national and local evaluations has and will continue to be used to improve the quality of services provided by the Chicago supervised visitation centers.³

Additionally, as a demonstration site grantee, Chicago also participated in a Safety Audit with Praxis International. For this project, Chicago examined how families from diverse backgrounds experience supervised visitation and/or safe exchange services. Included in this examination was a review of how the current design and operating procedures and practices of the three Chicago visitation centers account for culture.

The audit process involved all of the local partners and included activities such as conducting separate focus groups with custodial and non-custodial parents, completing interviews with visitation center staff, and collective reviews of redacted client files. The audit process allowed the Chicago local partners to closely examine intake procedures, documentation practices and methods, and security measures through the lens of culture. This activity was both validating and informative, and had a profound impact on service delivery practices among the three visitation centers.⁴ Specific findings and lessons learned from the Chicago audit will be discussed in a later section of this report.

Finally, the Chicago Safe Havens collaborative also benefited greatly from the wealth of training and technical assistance opportunities provided to all Safe Havens grantees. Staff from the three supervised visitation centers and members of the Local Consulting Committee were able to take part in numerous events that addressed key programmatic issues encountered by visitation centers. The collaborative partners also received training on issues such as

³ At the time this report was written, the local and national evaluations were still under review. These evaluations will be posted on the City of Chicago Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence's website once approved and officially released. www.cityofchicago.org/domesticviolence.

⁴ A full copy of the Chicago Safe Havens Safety Audit Report can be found on the Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence's website at <http://www.cityofchicago.org/domesticviolence>.

documentation, working with men who batter, and enhancing community collaborations. As a demonstration site, Chicago was able to access additional specialized technical assistance and engage in small think tank discussions with the other national demonstration sites on important issues such as documentation, confidentiality, and intake procedures. All of these technical assistance opportunities helped the Chicago visitation centers consider ways to improve service delivery.

Incorporated Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Services into Chicago's Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Violence

As previously mentioned, the Chicago Safe Havens project convened two multi-disciplinary working groups as part of this grant initiative. The Local Partners Work Group met monthly and the Local Consulting Committee met quarterly throughout the four year duration of the grant. These meetings resulted in cross-training, information sharing, and enhanced referrals to the visitation centers. In addition to these core partnerships, the Chicago Safe Havens project also worked to enhance collaborations between the three supervised visitation centers, local domestic violence programs, and the local courts. Specific outcomes of these enhanced partnerships will be addressed in more detail later in this report.

Began Identifying Sustained Funding for Visitation and Exchange Services

Finally, during the demonstration initiative the Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence began conducting outreach to government and private entities with the goal of sustaining and expanding supervised visitation and safe exchanges services to families impacted by domestic violence in Chicago. Although some short-term success was made in securing new sources of

funding for the Chicago programs, current federal, state, and city funding cuts will ultimately impact the visitation centers in 2008. Continued work in this area is required.

IV. Guiding Assumptions, Lessons Learned and Practical Applications

The Office on Violence Against Women required that all Safe Havens grantees:

- Implement practices that promote safety at the visitation centers;
- Be grounded in an understanding of domestic violence; and
- Enhance local collaborations to comprehensively address the post separation needs of victims of domestic violence and their children.

Thus, in addition to implementing the project-specific goals previously outlined, the Chicago Safe Havens local collaborative also worked to address each of these areas.

Throughout the four year Safe Havens initiative, the local collaborative partners learned some valuable lessons about how to best operate domestic violence-informed supervised visitation and safe exchange centers, and developed guiding assumptions about program development and service delivery practices. This next section outlines some of these guiding assumptions and lessons learned, and highlights how the Chicago visitation centers practically applied this new knowledge to their daily practices.

A. Promoting Safety

Guiding Assumption: Supervised visitation centers must strive to create physically and emotionally safe spaces for adult victims and children. This guiding assumption has two important components the first being the commitment to ensuring that the safety needs and interests of *both* the adult and child victims are treated with equal regard. The acknowledgement

that the adult victim's safety needs are equally as important as the child's differentiates the visitation centers funded under the Safe Havens project with many of those who work exclusively in the child welfare system. The Chicago visitation centers recognize that working to address the safety needs of the adult victim has a direct impact on restoring the well-being of the child who has been exposed to or experienced abuse directly.

The second component to this guiding assumption is the understanding that creating emotionally safe space for visitation and exchange is equally as important in working to address the safety needs of victims and their children as creating physically safe spaces.

Lessons Learned and Practical Applications

i. Security Measures

Supervised child visitation centers are unique in that they work with both the adult victim and the person who has used violence during a commonly dangerous and high-risk period of time. As a result, the Chicago visitation centers acknowledge that some physical security measures are essential. We in Chicago have learned, however, that promoting emotionally safe space is just as important to creating a sense of physical safety. Consequently, through our experience we have found that clients and staff can feel safe at the visitation center without the presence of armed security guards or metal detectors.

One of the primary goals of supervised visitation centers is to protect the child and adult victim from further abuse or possible abduction during the visit or exchange. Although the visitation centers recognize that they cannot eliminate the risks completely, they can implement certain standard practices to help enhance safety to the greatest extent possible. One example of a standardized security measure adopted by all three of Chicago's supervised visitation centers is

the practice of staggering the arrival and departure times of the custodial and non-custodial parents. At all of the three visitation centers, the custodial parent arrives and leaves at least 15 minutes before the non-custodial parent. This practice, however, can be changed based upon the client's wishes and the circumstances of the case. For example, if the victim of abuse is the non-custodial parent, the visitation centers might consider changing this practice and allow them to leave first.

In addition to having staggered arrival and departure times, the visitation centers also have different waiting rooms for the parents. Sometimes these waiting rooms are located on different floors to reduce the risk of contact. Custodial and non-custodial parents are instructed to go directly to their specific waiting area when they arrive at the visitation center and it is considered a rule violation if this practice is ignored.

Safety at the centers is also promoted through the practice of monitoring visits. Staff remain in the visitation room to monitor conversations and interactions between the non-custodial parent and child. Staff listen and observe to ensure that the non-custodial parent is not trying to engage the child in conversations about the victim parent or asking the child questions that could jeopardize their safety (i.e. questions about where they are living, what school they are going to, who has been over to the house, etc.). Visits are also monitored closely to ensure that the non-custodial parent does not try to slip the child notes or gifts for the custodial parent.

Other ways that the visitation centers work to promote safety for victims and children include terminating a specific visit, ending services completely, or refusing to accept cases if the risk appears too great or when the parent who has used violence violates the center's rules. In addition to these security measures and practices, Safe Havens funds also enabled Chicago's three supervised visitation centers to install panic buttons in the visitation rooms that are linked

directly to 911, purchase two way radios and/or cell phones that can be used to communicate between staff and victims, and increase staffing levels to ensure that more than one staff person is onsite at all times. Finally, staff at the visitation centers work to protect the victim and child's confidential information such as their address or the location of the child's school through their documentation practices. Information that could jeopardize a client's safe location is not shared unless there is a written release of information from the victim.

Finally, separate in-person intakes are conducted with each parent prior to the start of services, which helps to promote physical safety at the center. Intake is a time when staff collect information on the dynamics of the family and assess the level of risk. This is especially important in cases where the non-custodial parent is actually the victim of abuse.

These comprehensive measures enable the visitation centers to promote safety for victims and their children without creating an overly punitive or disrespectful environment for the non-custodial parents. This fine balance helps to create visitation centers that not only foster physical safety but also build a level of comfort and ease among the clients who may have been resistant to using the services.

ii. Respectful and Fair Interactions with Clients

In order to develop physically and emotionally safe space for visitation and exchange, the Chicago Safe Havens collaborative also recognizes that it is important for staff to have respectful and fair interactions with all family members. As a result, the visitation centers strive to ensure that all clients (including those who have used violence) are treated in a respectful way. Such a commitment helps create a sense of trust between staff and clients, and can work to de-escalate

certain situations. Indeed we have learned through this process that one of the best safety indicators can be the staff/client relationship.

From a client's first point of contact with the visitation center at intake, staff demonstrate their commitment to respectful and fair interactions through practices as simple but as meaningful as using formal titles such as Mr., Ms., or Señor, when greeting a client. The visitation centers also have adopted a more conversational approach to the intake process, which does not rely so heavily on completing standardized forms.⁵ This practice promotes a sense of emotional safety since it provides the victim with an opportunity to speak freely about the violence experienced, and is a time when staff can listen to each parent's concerns and expectations, and prepare the non-custodial parent for their child's reaction to seeing them. By showing clients respect and listening to their experiences, families begin to trust the visitation center and the staff from their first point of contact with services.

The importance of the initial intake experience cannot be overstated especially since the majority of custodial and non-custodial parents are unhappy with being ordered to services and are often reluctant to come to the visitation center.⁶ Both parents often believe that the service benefits the other parent, and they commonly feel powerless over the situation. The parent who has been abused is often unhappy that the abusive parent gets to see the children, and they are commonly scared for their child's safety. The parent who has used violence regards the services as punitive, and they are often angry with the victim and staff for restricting their access to their children. The Chicago visitation centers have found that showing clients respect and listening to

⁵ Many visitation centers in other jurisdictions send parents the intake forms via mail to complete on their own before services begin. The in-person, conversational approach to the intake process adopted by the three Chicago visitation centers encourages a more natural flow to the conversation and allows the visitation center staff to begin developing relationships with each parent immediately.

⁶ In Chicago, almost all families are ordered to supervised visitation/safe exchange services by the courts.

their experiences and concerns during the intake process can help reduce these feelings of frustration and powerlessness.

It is important to state, however, that while the visitation centers are committed to treating the abusive parent fairly and with respect, they in no way tolerate or condone their violence. Even as they build a rapport with the parent who has used violence, staff hold them accountable for their past and current abusive behavior. Staff do not minimize or ignore past violence, as demonstrated by their practice of collecting information during intake, and they speak frankly but respectfully with the parent who has used violence about why their children might be reluctant or scared to see them.

The visitation center staff also spend time during the intake process reviewing the center's rules and their expectations for both parents. This is extremely important so that both parents know what to expect from the services and what the consequences for breaking the program rules can be. The centers let parents know that the rules are in place to promote a safe and positive environment for all parties, and explain that the staff monitoring can be used to enhance relationships between the non-custodial parent and their children.

Staff are also very clear when they discuss what the role of the center is, and make sure to explain that they do not make custody recommendations to the court. This clarification often provides some reassurance to non-custodial parents who might otherwise feel judged. Additionally, letting custodial parents know the centers do not conduct custody evaluations provides them with some reassurance that staff will not be manipulated by the abusive parent who may be very well behaved in a supervised setting.

The visitation centers also strive to create an environment for the visits that is comfortable, home like, and as natural as possible. Having said that, the centers acknowledge that there is

something inherently unnatural about having someone monitor and observe an interaction between a parent and their child. In order to provide these services in a respectful way, the center staff intervene only when necessary, and refrain from taking notes during the visit, which can feel very oppressive and unsettling for the non-custodial parent.

It is important to recognize that the visitation centers see a variety of different types of cases, which can range from children who witnessed the abuse between their parents, to cases in which there are allegations of child sexual abuse, to cases where the non-custodial parent is being reunited with their children after long periods of time. Similarly the ages of the visiting children can also range from infants to older teens. As a result, the Chicago visitation centers recognize that no one program model fits all needs, and each of these cases may require different levels of staff monitoring and intervention.

Depending on the circumstances of the case, therefore, staff might adopt different levels of monitoring. For example, in all new cases and in cases where there are serious allegations of abuse and violence the center staff will sit very close to the non-custodial parent and child during the visit to ensure safety. In cases when the family has been coming to the center for long periods of time and when there hasn't been rule violations the visitation staff (while still remaining in the room during the visit) might sit back from the non-custodial parent and child and give them some space. These modifications to the level of staff monitoring can help create a less punitive feeling environment for the non-custodial parents.

To help clients feel more comfortable at the visitation center, the staff also constantly check-in with both the custodial parent and the child. This practice was more formally implemented by Chicago's visitation centers after custodial parents reported feeling that the center's services were geared more towards the non-custodial parent. The Chicago visitation centers understood

why custodial parents might have this impression since aside from the intake process, visitation center staff do spend more time interacting with the non-custodial parents. In response to this concern, which was also articulated by custodial parents using visitation centers in other areas of the country, the Chicago visitation centers now make time to check-in with the custodial parents and listen to their concerns on a regular basis.

Additionally, the visitation center staff are committed to respecting the wishes of both the custodial parents and the children, which also helps foster a respectful environment for families. For example, staff will not force a child to visit with their parent, and they will get permission from the custodial parent before allowing the visiting parent to bring food, presents, or extended family members into the visit.

The Chicago collaborative has found that this commitment to treating all clients, including those who have used violence, with respect and fairness does not compromise safety at the visitation center, but may actually enhance it.

iii. Valuing Multiculturalism and Diversity

The Chicago visitation centers are committed to valuing multiculturalism and diversity, and work to acknowledge the different cultures, backgrounds, and individual life circumstances of the families they serve. This is done through the practice of cultural humility, which is defined as an ongoing commitment to self-examination and self-critique.⁷

The visitation centers support the cultural traditions of their clients through staff training, self-examination, and the practice of listening as their clients discuss their unique individual experiences and perspectives. This is especially important since staff recognize that there are a

⁷ Melanie Tervalon and Jann Murray-Garcia, *Cultural Humility Versus Cultural Competence: A Critical Distinction in Defining Physician Training Outcomes in Multicultural Education*, Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved, 9:2, 117-125, 1998.

multitude of different individual experiences within any one cultural group and you can never have a single person represent an entire community. Additionally, the visitation centers implement certain practices such as allowing non-custodial parents to bring in special food, practice certain religious traditions, or invite extended family members to the visit if pre-approved by the custodial parent. The centers also work to ensure that their materials are translated in different languages and that the décor of their office space reflects the diversity of families using their center.

As part of the Safe Havens grant initiative, Chicago participated in a local Safety Audit, which examined how families from diverse backgrounds experience supervised visitation and safe exchange services. This topic was selected because Chicago's three visitation centers serve families from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds and each of the three centers have developed an expertise in delivering services to underserved populations. Activities undertaken as part of the audit process included reviewing current visitation center operating practices and procedures through a cultural perspective, and hosting separate focus group discussions with current custodial and non-custodial parent clients.

Through the audit process and the practice of cultural humility, the Chicago visitation centers were able to re-examine their program practices, policies, and physical space to consider how clients from different cultural backgrounds might experience the services and the visitation centers. The audit process confirmed our understanding that cultural factors and histories influence the way in which people regard and experience supervised visitation and safe exchange services, and also taught us that certain situations can be de-escalated if people feel they are understood and their traditions are valued. Conducting this intensive self-reflection and

reviewing the findings from the focus group discussions, furthermore, helped to validate certain center practices as well as identify areas that were in need of enhancement.

One current practice that was viewed positively by clients is the practice of conducting a conversational approach to the intake process. This approach still allows the visitation center staff to collect the necessary demographic, client history, and risk assessment information, but frees them from having to read off of a set form. Clients reported appreciating this more natural flow to the intake process, and feel as though ample time is built in for staff to explain the services and the role of the center. This approach was especially appreciated by clients who were recent immigrants and who had limited English proficiency since words such as “supervised visitation” are not easily translated and the concept of the services is often unfamiliar.

Through the audit process the Chicago visitation centers also came to more fully recognize the cultural bias that existed in their observation forms, which are used to document what occurred during a visit or exchange. Additionally, visitation center staff began to recognize how what they document and how they perceive or interpret a specific behavior is influenced by their own cultural norms, which may or may not be the same as their clients. As a result of these recognitions, specific changes were made to all three of the visitation center’s observation and reporting forms.

Another way that the visitation centers demonstrate their value of diversity is through their commitment to (when possible) hire bilingual and bicultural staff. For example, Mujeres employs bilingual and bicultural staff to deliver services in Spanish, and Apna Ghar has staff available to provide services in several Southeast Asian languages. In a city as large and diverse as Chicago, however, it is not always possible to have staff speak every language that a client

might need, and in these cases the visitation centers will work to try to locate interpretation services.

The visitation centers are also very thoughtful of the historical experiences of their clients, and how certain security measures might be viewed or felt by clients who have experienced oppression and racism. This consideration is demonstrated by the current security measures at the Chicago centers, which do not include having armed guards or metal detectors at their sites.

Finally, the Chicago centers recognize that for many of their clients, the court system is often associated with fear, confusion, powerlessness, and disrespect. Consequently, even though the majority of their cases are referred by the courts, the visitation centers are committed to maintaining an identity that is separate from the court. For example, instead of being housed within a court or other government building, Chicago's three visitation centers are located in non-threatening office buildings in the communities they primarily serve. This separation was universally acknowledged by clients who participated in the local focus group discussions as important.

The Chicago Safe Havens collaborative has come to more fully recognize that by valuing multiculturalism and diversity, such practices can help to foster a sense of trust and respect between the clients and staff and promote overall safety for families using the visitation centers.

iv. Conducting Ongoing Risk Assessment

By practicing cultural humility, the Chicago visitation centers came to more fully appreciate how no two families and no two cases are alike. This recognition also has important safety implications since it reminded the centers that the level of risk the abusive parent can pose to victims and children is also unique and can change over time. For example, the visitation centers have seen fairly low-risk cases escalate after a court date, an anniversary event, or some

unwanted contact between visits. Consequently, the Chicago centers recognize the importance of conducting ongoing risk assessments with their victim clients.

At each of the visitation centers, risk assessment begins during intake and continues throughout the duration of services. During the initial intake process, staff inquire about the family's history of violence and ask direct questions about past incidents of abuse including whether any weapons were used. The centers also assess the victim's perception of their and their children's safety throughout their time in the program by conducting ongoing check-ins. These check-ins not only help staff reassess the client's perception of their own safety, but can also alert them to any incidents that might have occurred between the visits or exchanges. This practice is extremely important since the Chicago visitation centers came to learn that victim clients are commonly subjected to unwanted contact with the parent who has used violence between the visits/exchanges. Finally, the Chicago visitation centers discovered that conducting ongoing risk assessments and check-ins with the custodial parents enhances their sense of emotional safety at the center since they feel valued and supported.

v. Strengthening Community Collaborations

Participation in the Safe Havens grant initiative helped to further strengthen our belief that supervised visitation centers play a crucial role in addressing the post separation needs of victims of domestic violence and their children. As a result, the Chicago Local Consulting Committee has worked to successfully integrate the visitation centers into the city's coordinated community response to domestic violence.

Visitation centers have a unique and specific role, which is to provide a safe place for a non-custodial parent to visit or exchange their child. Although they work with families who have

been impacted by domestic violence every day, the visitation centers are not charged with providing domestic violence counseling or batterer's intervention services. To ensure that a family's additional supportive needs are met, the visitation centers recognize the importance of establishing formal relationships with community-based programs so that appropriate referrals for counseling, shelter, legal advocacy, and batterer's intervention services can be provided.

B. Domestic Violence Informed Services

Guiding Assumption: Supervised visitation and safe exchange centers must be grounded in an understanding of domestic violence. Studies have shown that the risk of violence to victims of domestic violence and their children often increases when abusive relationships end.

Consequently, supervised visitation centers face the unique challenge of working with all family members during this often turbulent and high-risk period of time. Visitation centers, therefore, need to demonstrate an understanding of how abusers can use custody and child visitation arrangements to continue their physical, psychological, and emotional abuse, and become aware of a victim's and their children's immediate and ongoing safety needs.

Two of Chicago's three visitation centers (Apna Ghar and Mujeres) are housed within larger domestic violence service agencies. All three visitation centers, however, are grounded in an understanding of domestic violence and work to promote victim safety and abuser accountability.

Lessons Learned and Practical Applications

i. Training

Supervised visitation centers can demonstrate their commitment to being domestic violence-informed by ensuring that all program staff and volunteers receive specialized training on the

dynamics of domestic violence and how abusers can use supervised visitation or safe exchange services to further abuse their victims. Training must also be provided to teach staff skills for working with abusers, and how common program practices could be used against victims of domestic violence by the court system.

In Chicago, all three of the visitation centers provide comprehensive training to program staff and volunteers at both the beginning and throughout the duration of their employment. All visitation center staff must complete the standard 40-hours of domestic violence training, which provides an overview on the dynamics of domestic violence, issues of power and control, important safety planning strategies, and the impact witnessing domestic violence can have on children. Additionally, staff at the Chicago visitation centers receive training on specialized topics including:

- how abusers can use custody and visitation arrangements, supervised visitation/exchange services, and/or the court system to further victimize the other parent,
- how staff can work to engage perpetrators of domestic violence without condoning their violence,
- how to respectfully intervene during a visit,
- how to conduct conversational style intakes and client check-ins, and
- visitation centers program rules, policies and programmatic procedures, including security measures and documentation practices.

As a demonstration site grantee, the Chicago visitation centers also received ongoing specialized training on relevant service delivery topics including fathering after violence, working with families with a history of child sexual abuse, working with children who have

special needs, working with families from diverse backgrounds, and working with victims who are the non-custodial parents.

By providing such comprehensive training, the Chicago visitation centers demonstrate their understanding of domestic violence, and give their staff and volunteers the tools and information they need to create safe places for victims and their children.

ii. Program Policies and Practices

Although monitored visitation is not a new type of service,⁸ visitation services offered under the Safe Havens grant are unique in that they are provided to families who have a history of domestic violence. This difference is significant since it requires that visitation centers be developed in a way that prioritizes the safety of the adult victim *and* child(ren). In order for visitation centers to adequately reflect a comprehensive understanding of domestic violence and the impact the abuse can have on victims and children, specific program policies and protocols must be established and continuously assessed.

Although the three Chicago supervised visitation centers were already grounded in an understanding of domestic violence prior to the award of Safe Havens funding, participating in the demonstration initiative provided an opportunity for the local collaborative to think more critically about current visitation center policies and practices. Through this process the Chicago local partners closely examined how certain rules or procedures could positively or negatively impact victims of domestic violence and their children, and considered ways abusers could use the service against their victim.

⁸ The Illinois Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS), for example, supports monitored/supervised visits for children who are wards of the state or in the custody of someone other than their natural parent(s). In these cases the children have been removed from their parent(s) as a result of child abuse or neglect.

The Chicago visitation centers demonstrate this heightened understanding of domestic violence in the following operating practices and procedures:

A. Security

As previously discussed and outlined, each of Chicago's three visitation centers implement standard security measures to ensure the safety of the adult victim of domestic violence and their children. Safety and security measures are in place because the visitation centers recognize the real risk that abusers pose to victims especially during the post separation period. The visitation centers structure their programs in a way that prevents contact between the custodial and non-custodial parents and helps ensure that the parent who has used violence does not use their visits or exchanges with their child as a way to further abuse and harass the other parent. Rules related to the visitation center's security practices are discussed with each parent prior to the start of services, and a visit/exchange will be terminated if any of these rules are violated.

B. Risk Assessment and Client Check-Ins

Since Chicago's three visitation centers are grounded in an understanding of domestic violence, they also recognize that the risk to a specific victim and/or child can vary and change over time. Given this understanding, all three of Chicago's visitation centers conduct initial and ongoing risk assessments with both the custodial and non-custodial parents.

During the intake process, for example, visitation center staff ask each parent to describe the most recent incident of violence, and also inquire about past levels of violence and abuse. In a few instances, the visitation centers will determine that the case is too dangerous and is therefore

not appropriate for services. When such determinations are made, the visitation centers will report this information back to the court.

For the rest of the cases, visitation center staff pay careful attention to the dynamics of the abuse reported by the parents and ask the victim parent about any specific concerns related to the visits/exchanges that they may have. Conducting a comprehensive assessment at point of intake is also important since in some instances the non-custodial parent is actually the victim of domestic violence. The visitation centers recognize how abusers can use the court system against their victims, and are sensitive to the fact that some victims have lost custody of their children. The gathering of this information during the intake process provides valuable historical context for the visitation center staff and alerts them to things they should be looking out for during the visits/exchanges. Visitation center staff also use information obtained during intake to tailor services to address each individual family's unique safety needs. For example, visitation centers may make a determination to accompany a victim to the parking lot or refrain from having the non-custodial parent take the child to the bathroom if such needs are required or requested.

In addition to collecting information during the intake process, the Chicago visitation center staff have also come to recognize the importance of checking in with the victim parent on a frequent basis between visits or exchanges. During these check-ins, visitation center staff ask the victim parent how they perceive the services to be going, how the child is handling the visits/exchanges, and if they have any specific concerns regarding their or their child's safety. The visitation centers will also use this opportunity to inquire about whether the abusive parent has been making unwanted attempts to contact the victim parent in between visits or exchanges, which is something we learned is very common, but seldom reported to the visitation centers. Finally, this practice helps the visitation staff stay informed about upcoming court dates, which

could increase the risk for a victim and child. Such practices demonstrate that the visitation centers understand the dynamics of domestic violence and how the risk to a victim can change over time.

C. Documentation Practices

One of the most significant lessons learned during the Chicago Safe Havens demonstration initiative came when the Local Partners realized that the supervised visitation center staff do not have the same confidentiality privileges as domestic violence advocates, even if they have completed the required 40 hours of domestic violence training. Under the Illinois Domestic Violence Act, any person who has received a minimum of 40 hours of domestic violence training and provides services to victims of domestic violence through a domestic violence program cannot be compelled to disclose confidential client-level information. Supervised visitation and safe exchange services, however, are provided to the entire family, and are therefore not recognized as domestic violence services under the Illinois Domestic Violence Act. As a result, visitation staff can be compelled to disclose information shared by any party of the client family.

Although Illinois legislation unintentionally created the limitations on confidentiality for supervised visitation providers locally, it became evident during the course of the Safe Havens project that this is a challenge faced by many other centers across the country. This reality propelled the Chicago visitation centers to reconsider current documentation practices. By being grounded in an understanding of domestic violence, the visitation centers were able to thoughtfully consider how information they document could be used against a victim in court.

The Chicago visitation centers also spent time considering their own role within the court process and how that role impacts their documentation practices. For example, the Chicago

centers are clear that even though cases are referred to them by the courts, they are not custody evaluators or clinicians, and should not be viewed as such. The visitation centers recognize that their documentation should not be used as a source of information to determine an abusive parent's suitability or unsuitability for unsupervised visits since all services take place in a monitored and controlled environment.

When client case files were reviewed during this initiative, however, members of the local collaborative realized that some of the information documented by visitation center staff could be misread or misused by the courts. The careful review of client files and close examination of documentation practices therefore allowed the visitation centers to recognize that documenting subjective information such as "the children seemed happy to see their father" or "the father happily played with the children during the visit" might be viewed by the court as an indication of the abusive parent's ability to provide safe parenting outside of a supervised setting. This recognition resulted in changes to the observation forms and reporting practices at each of the three visitation centers.

The Chicago supervised visitation centers also worked to address their lack of confidentiality and better understanding of their role by putting into place as many precautions in their documentation practices as possible. First, the visitation centers only release information when subpoenaed, and do not provide routine reports back to the courts. Additionally, the visitation centers make sure that any information regarding the victim's confidential location, place of employment, or the children's school is not included on the forms provided to the courts.

The visitation centers have also begun to record and document less information. Prior to the demonstration initiative, each of the three centers had different documentation and reporting practices. Some of the centers were recording detailed case notes on the visits/exchanges, and

some were providing detailed reports back to the court. After acknowledging their limited confidentiality privileges and carefully reviewing how information could be used against a domestic violence victim in court, however, all three of the visitation centers made the decision to cut back on these practices. Now the Chicago centers only document when the visits occurred, why a visit/exchange was cancelled, what activities were conducted during the visit, and any critical incidents such as rule violations that occurred during the visit/exchange.

In order to ensure that the information reported back to the courts is consistent, the Chicago Safe Havens Local Partners also created a standardized Court Reporting form that is now used by all three visitation centers when they respond to subpoenas requesting service-level information.⁹ This form ensures that the visitation center staff are only reporting objective information that relates to the visits/exchanges. The centers are very clear that this report reflects behavior that occurred in a controlled and supervised setting, which should not be used to infer what would happen in an unsupervised environment. The centers are also very clear that this report should not be used to determine long-term custody or visitation arrangements.

Finally, the visitation centers also recognized the importance of letting the courts know when services were discontinued or when a case was not accepted into the program because of the risk it posed to the victim, child, and/or the visitation center. To address this need the Chicago Safe Havens Local Partners created a standardized Discontinuation of Services form that is presented to the courts (in response to a subpoena), and outlines the reason why services are no longer being provided by the center.¹⁰

⁹ See Appendix A for the Court Reporting Form.

¹⁰ See Appendix B for the Discontinuation of Services Form.

D. Advocacy and Community Collaborations

In addition to exploring their role related to documentation and court reporting practices, the Chicago visitation centers also spent time considering their role within the larger domestic violence service community. Throughout the Chicago Safe Havens initiative, it became clear that many of the victims using the visitation centers do not receive additional supportive services from a domestic violence provider or batterer's intervention program even though many have unmet service needs including legal representation/advocacy and counseling. In conversations with the local partners and other national demonstration site grantees, however, it became clear that the visitation centers cannot perform the duties of a domestic violence advocate or abuser treatment provider for two important reasons. First, limited confidentiality privileges preclude the visitation centers from providing direct domestic violence intervention services. Any services provided to a victim at the center could be discoverable in court, which could jeopardize their safety. Secondly, the visitation centers provide services to all family members and providing more specialized domestic violence or abuser treatment intervention to parents would make them be perceived as favoring one party over the other. Since they are limited in their ability to provide additional supportive assistance to clients, the visitation centers must be equipped to link victims to appropriate community-based resources by establishing collaborative partnerships.

Given their unique position of providing post-separation services, the visitation centers are also able to collect and report out on unmet victim service needs and trends during this high-risk period of time. For example, the centers are able to track the number of non-custodial parent victims who come into their programs, and those who have not been connected to a domestic violence advocate. In Chicago, the Local Consulting Committee meetings are a place where these unmet needs can be presented and discussed. In this way, the Chicago Safe Havens

collaborative has been successful in incorporating the visitation center's experience into larger local advocacy efforts to address domestic violence.

C. Collaboration

Guiding Assumption: Supervised visitation and safe exchange centers must strive to establish collaborations with community partners who work to address the post separation needs of victims of domestic violence and their children. Visitation centers bring a unique perspective to domestic violence collaborations since they provide services to each member of the family. In this role, they have the ability to inform others on the post-separation needs of victims, abusers, and children. The visitation centers, however, cannot work in isolation and must be fully integrated into comprehensive efforts to respond to domestic violence.

Lessons Learned and Practical Applications

Participation in the Safe Havens demonstration initiative confirmed our understanding that supervised visitation centers play an important role in addressing the post-separation needs of domestic violence victims. Too often, however, these programs have not been involved in larger efforts to address domestic violence, and their important role has been overlooked. Additionally, it has also become clear that many of the families who use supervised visitation services do not receive additional assistance from a domestic violence or batterer's intervention program. As a result, many of their post-separation needs go unmet. Since the visitation centers cannot provide these specialized intervention services directly, it is important that they partner with local community-based programs so appropriate referrals can be made.

i. Partnerships with Domestic Violence Programs

In Chicago, we have come to recognize that the visitation centers not only have the ability to raise awareness on the post-separation needs of families impacted by domestic violence, but they can act as strong advocates for domestic violence victims and their children. In response to this recognition, the Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence and Chicago Department of Human Services have worked to enhance partnerships between the Safe Havens visitation centers and the larger domestic violence advocacy community. This has been accomplished by including the supervised visitation centers in periodic meetings and trainings with the domestic violence community, as well as adding information about the supervised visitation programs to the City of Chicago Domestic Violence Help Line database.¹¹

To further enhance local collaborations, the Chicago Safe Havens project also partnered with domestic violence service providers by engaging the Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women's Network (CMBWN), a consortium of domestic violence service providers in Chicago, and Life Span, a legal services agency and Legal Assistance to Victims (LAV) grantee. The Executive Directors of these programs served on the Chicago Safe Havens Local Consulting Committee and helped inform the development of visitation center protocols and procedures. Each of the Chicago supervised visitation centers also made a concerted effort to partner with community-based domestic violence programs. For example, the supervised visitation centers at Apna Ghar and Mujeres established more formalized relationships with their own parent domestic violence agencies, and Branch enhanced their collaboration with two community based domestic violence programs, Rainbow House and Family Rescue.

¹¹ The City of Chicago Domestic Violence Help Line is a 24-hour, toll-free confidential number that functions as a clearinghouse for domestic violence services and information.

Finally, on May 16, 2007 the Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence and Chicago's three supervised visitation centers hosted a half-day training for the larger domestic violence service community on issues related to custody and visitation in cases involving domestic violence. At this training, information on Illinois' custody laws was presented, and the visitation centers discussed the services available at their centers. This training provided an excellent opportunity to inform the local domestic violence programs about the need for supervised visitation and safe exchange services and helped them recognize the important role these centers play in addressing the post separation needs of victims and their children.

ii. Partnerships through the Local Consulting Committee

Collaborations were also further developed and enhanced through the Chicago Safe Havens Local Consulting Committee. For over four years, this multidisciplinary group met on a quarterly basis. These meetings promoted relationship building, networking, and information sharing, and helped to identify each system's unique role in the city's coordinated response to domestic violence. Additionally, these quarterly meetings provided an opportunity for the visitation centers to share their experiences and report out on emerging trends and issues impacting their clients and their centers. Some of these issues included the increase in the number of non-custodial parents using visitation/exchange services who were the victims of abuse, the large number of victim clients who did not have legal representation in their custody or divorce cases, and the large number of victim clients who were not receiving additional supportive services from a domestic violence program. The Local Consulting Committee also spent time considering how the court referral process could be improved. Specifically, thought was given to what

information should be shared back to the court by the visitation centers and what should be done if the visitation centers determine that a case is too dangerous for services.

Finally, the Local Consulting Committee meetings provided an opportunity for cross system education on important post-separation issues such as Illinois custody laws and fathering after violence. Several members of the Local Consulting Committee also participated in training and institutes provided on both a local and national level, and members facilitated trainings for groups not involved in the Safe Havens project including their own program staff and attorneys who represent pro se victims in the Cook County Domestic Violence Court.

The Local Consulting Committee provided a unique opportunity for cross system education and work, which advised the development, implementation, and evaluation of supervised visitation and safe exchange services in Chicago. It is important to mention that all members of Chicago's Local Consulting Committee have expressed their commitment to continue collaborating with the three visitation centers and the Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence once federal funding ends.

iii. Partnerships with the Courts

Another key area of collaboration within the Chicago Safe Havens Demonstration initiative was the development of a more formalized partnership between the supervised visitation centers and the courts. In Chicago, cases involving issues of divorce, paternity, custody, and visitation are brought before the Cook County Circuit Court's Domestic Relations Division. The Domestic Relations Division also includes judges who hear requests for emergency and plenary orders of protections. Since this division is where referrals to the Chicago Safe Havens visitation centers

are generated, it became apparent that enhancing collaborations between the centers and courts was imperative.

The presiding judge of the Cook County Domestic Relations Division was an original member of the Local Consulting Committee, and other judges actively engaged in activities throughout the grant initiative. Specifically, judges from the Domestic Relations Division attended trainings and institutes facilitated by the Safe Havens technical assistance providers, and worked with the three visitation centers and the Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence to develop standardized court referral and reporting practices.

As previously stated, almost all of the families who receive services at Chicago's three visitation centers are referred by the court. Prior to the implementation of this initiative, however, there were no standard referral practices, and inappropriate referrals were being made to the centers. For example, judges might order a family to have visits on a specific day when the center was not open or at a time that was already taken. In response to this challenge, the Chicago Safe Havens collaborative developed a standardized referral form that the courts now use when ordering a family to supervised visitation or safe exchange services.¹² This form, which was developed with considerable input from the presiding judge and visitation centers, records basic information about the family members, gives specific instructions related to the maximum frequency of visits/exchanges, and outlines other stipulations agreed upon in the court proceedings. The form was submitted to the court's Domestic Relations Division's Forms Reviewing Committee, and was approved for use in the spring of 2007.

The partnership with the courts also resulted in the development of a standardized court reporting form and a discontinuation of services form, both of which have been previously discussed in this report. These forms have helped standardize the Chicago visitation center's

¹² See Appendix C for the Court Referral Form.

reporting practices, and take into consideration ways that the center's documentation could be used against a victim during the court process. Instead of providing subjective information, the visitation centers now only report information that is directly related to the visitation and exchange sessions facilitated at the center.

Finally, on May 16, 2006, the Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence and the presiding judge hosted a full day judicial training entitled "Enhancing Judicial Skills: Domestic Violence, Child Custody and Visitation." This training was attended by 37 of the 44 judges in Chicago's Domestic Relations Division, and provided information on relevant laws and factors to consider when ordering supervised visitation or safe exchange services in cases involving domestic violence. The implementation of this specialized training provides another example of how local collaborations between the courts and the visitation centers were enhanced as a result of the Safe Havens initiative.

V. Ongoing Work and Next Steps

Participating in the Safe Havens demonstration initiative enabled the Chicago visitation centers and collaborating partners to thoughtfully enhance supervised visitation and safe exchange services for families impacted by domestic violence. Although much was accomplished over the grant's four years, there are still unmet victim service needs and programmatic challenges that require additional attention and thoughtful consideration.

Unmet Service Needs

i. Legal Services

Throughout this initiative, it became clear that many victims of domestic violence do not have access to specialized legal advocacy or legal services during their divorce or custody

proceedings. This trend has been documented by the Chicago visitation centers who see victims losing custody of their children and coming into the center as the non-custodial parent because they lack or have inadequate legal representation. As a result, the Chicago Safe Havens collaborative recognizes the need to advocate for more domestic violence-informed legal services to ensure that pro se non-custodial victims can access legal representation.

ii. Domestic Violence Services

Additionally, the Chicago Safe Havens collaborative recognized the need to ensure that victims using the visitation centers are provided with referrals to community-based domestic violence services. Such linkages are important since many victims have additional advocacy needs that the visitation center cannot address. To respond to this unmet need, the local collaborative is looking into institutionalizing a direct referral to an identified domestic violence advocate at point of intake for all supervised visitation center victim clients.

iii. Exploring Different Models of Visitation Services

The Chicago visitation centers currently offer monitored supervision, which involves close monitoring of the visit between the non-custodial parent and child(ren), re-direction of the non-custodial parent when necessary, and interruption or termination of the visits when rules are violated. Throughout the demonstration initiative, however, there has been discussion about the need to consider developing different models of visitation, including therapeutic visitation. A therapeutic visitation program model often includes conducting more intensive intervention with the non-custodial parent and child, hosting individual meetings with the non-custodial parent to develop treatment goals, and employing specially trained visitation monitors. The Chicago local

partners are still considering if and when such services would be beneficial to families, and additional funding would need to be secured in order for the centers to begin implementing such a program model.

Ongoing Programmatic Challenges

i. How families transition out of services

In addition to addressing the identified unmet victim service needs, the Chicago local collaborative also is committed to addressing ongoing programmatic challenges commonly encountered by the visitation centers. One of these ongoing challenges is the seemingly random way families transition out of the visitation centers. Specifically, the Chicago local collaborative is concerned that in most cases there is not necessarily a smooth progression from supervised visitation to supervised exchange to unsupervised contact. Additionally, there are many cases that the visitation centers consider to be high risk that are ultimately granted unsupervised visitation by the courts. To effectively address this current trend and challenge, ongoing collaboration between the visitation centers, the courts, and local domestic violence and legal service programs must occur.

ii. Cases that are too dangerous

The Chicago visitation centers also encounter challenges when a family has been ordered by the court to receive supervised visitation or safe exchange services that the centers believe is too high risk to accept into their program. In these types of cases the visitation centers are frequently concerned that if they refuse to accept a case, the judge might decide to enter an order for unsupervised visits or identify an arrangement that would not account for the victim's safety

needs. This ongoing challenge also speaks to the need for effective collaboration between the visitation centers, the courts, domestic violence programs, and legal service providers.

iii. Sustainability

Finally, the Chicago Safe Havens initiative has been successful in raising awareness about the vital need for safe and domestic violence-informed supervised visitation and safe exchanges services. As this awareness continues, however, the demand for visitation and exchange services will only continue to increase. As a result, the Chicago Safe Havens collaborative remains committed to working towards the long-term maintenance and expansion of supervised visitation and safe exchange services in Chicago.

With Safe Havens funding the city was able to double the Chicago visitation center's service capacity, yet the centers were still not able to meet the demand for services. As federal Safe Havens funding draws to an end, local collaborative partners recognize that if current levels of supervised visitation and safe exchange services are not sustained many victims and children will go un-served and be left vulnerable to further abuse. As a result, it is imperative that current capacity levels be at least maintained and other sources of funding be explored and developed.

During this grant initiative, the Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence and the three visitation centers worked diligently to: educate others on the need for supervised visitation and safe exchange services, integrate these services into the city's coordinated response to domestic violence, and conduct outreach to potential funding sources. These efforts did result in the short-term funding of services by several local sources including the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, the Illinois Violence Prevention Authority and a few private foundations. The Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence was also able to advocate for a small increase of

funding to the visitation centers through the Community Block Development Grant funds administered by the City of Chicago.

Although successful, these efforts will not necessarily guarantee that the current service capacity levels at the visitation centers will be sustained in the long run. Additionally, new federal, state and city funding cuts are planned for 2008, which could have a dramatic impact on the supervised visitation centers. Ongoing efforts to identify permanent funding streams for supervised visitation and safe exchange services are in process and will need to continue to ensure that current service levels are maintained.

VI. Conclusion

Over the past four years, the Chicago Safe Havens demonstration initiative has worked to successfully develop and enhance safe and domestic violence-informed supervised visitation and safe exchange services. Time spent reviewing current practices and protocols, discussing emerging and unaddressed victim needs, and enhancing local collaborative partnerships have all helped to improve our ability to address the post separation needs of victims of domestic violence and their children. In 2007, the City of Chicago was awarded ongoing Safe Havens funding, which will enable the work of the local collaborative to continue. In the upcoming years, Chicago will work to address the identified unmet victim service needs and programmatic challenges, and look for ways to sustain and further expand supervised visitation and safe exchange services for victims of domestic violence and their children.

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Chicago Department of Human Services

Marjorie Johnson

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Appendix A

City of Chicago Safe Havens Court Reporting Form

Date of Visit/Exchange: ___/___/___ Court Case #: _____
Date of Report: _____

Name of Parent 1: _____ Date Intake Completed: _____

Name of Parent 2: _____ Date Intake Completed: _____

Name of Child 1: _____ D.O.B: _____ Name of Child 2: _____ D.O.B: _____

Name of Child 3: _____ D.O.B: _____ Name of Child 4: _____ D.O.B: _____

Type of service received:

Supervised Visitation Supervised Exchange

Service Details:

Visitation/Exchange Schedule: _____

Total Number of Visits/Exchanges Scheduled: _____

Number of Visit/Exchanges Facilitated: _____

Number of Cancelled Visits/Exchanges: _____

Issues and Concerns that Impacted Visitation/Exchange Sessions

Disclaimer: *This court reporting form is an observational and objective report on visits facilitated in a supervised setting. It should not be used to infer what would happen in an unsupervised environment. It is not reflective or representative of parenting skill in an unsupervised environment.*

Appendix B

City of Chicago Safe Havens Discontinuation of Services Form

Dates of Reported Visits/Exchanges: ___/___/___ to ___/___/___
Date Report Completed: _____

Name of Parent 1: _____ Custodial Parent ___ Non-Custodial Parent ___

Court Case #: _____

Name of Parent 2: _____ Custodial Parent ___ Non-Custodial Parent ___

Name of Child 1: _____ D.O.B: _____ Name of Child 2: _____ D.O.B: _____

Name of Child 3: _____ D.O.B: _____ Name of Child 4: _____ D.O.B: _____

Type of service received:

Supervised Visitation Supervised Exchange

Discontinuation of Services

Date of Discontinuation:

Discontinuation of Services initiated by:

Please note the reason(s) indicated in the decision to discontinue services below:

Report completed by:

Signature(s): _____

Date: _____

Supervisor Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

City of Chicago Safe Havens Court Referral Form

**IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS
COUNTY DEPARTMENT, DOMESTIC RELATIONS DIVISION**

Petitioner

V.

Respondent

No. _____

This case coming to be heard on Petitioner's Respondent's Other for _____, all parties being advised of the premises, Petitioner { with counsel pro se} Respondent { with counsel pro se} appearing, and this court having jurisdiction over the subject matter, by agreement after hearing,

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that the Petitioner Respondent Other shall have

Supervised Visitation Safe Exchange with _____
Name(s) of Child(ren)

AT (agency checked below is the preferred provider)

- Apna Ghar, Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange program
4753 N. Broadway, Suite 632, Chicago, IL 60602 TELEPHONE: (773) 334-0173 FAX (773) 334-0963
- The Branch Family Institute, Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange program
3139 W. 111th Street, Chicago, IL 60655 TELEPHONE: (773) 238-1100 FAX (773) 238-4095
- Mujeres Latinas en Acción, Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange program
1823 West 17th St., Chicago, IL 60608 TELEPHONE: (773) 890-7676 FAX (773) 890-7650
- Other _____

B. SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Order of Protection Protected Party: _____ Order No. _____
- Other _____

C. Identification of Parties, Children, Attorneys, GALs

Child(ren)'s Full Name(s)	Age	D.O.B.	Person whom Child(ren) Resides With
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Mother:
Name: _____
Address*: _____

Mother's Attorney:
Name: _____
Address: _____

Date of Birth: _____
Tel. No:(H) _____
(W) _____

Tel. No: _____
Fax: _____

(*If party has not disclosed an address, that party shall designate an alternative address for the purpose of notice)

Father:
Name: _____
Address*: _____

Date of Birth: _____
Tel. No:(H) _____
(W) _____

Other:
Name: _____
Address*: _____

Date of Birth: _____
Tel. No:(H) _____
(W) _____

Child's Representative/Guardian ad Litem/Attorney for Child

Name: _____
Address*: _____
Tel. No:(H) _____
(W) _____

Father's Attorney:
Name: _____
Address: _____

Tel. No: _____
Fax: _____

Other's Attorney:
Name: _____
Address: _____

Tel. No: _____
Fax: _____

D. Suggested Schedule of Visits: *Please indicate frequency, i.e. weekly or monthly*

Suggested visitation schedule is contingent upon supervised visitation center availability
Parties will make every effort to make themselves available for supervised visitation

E. Visitation scheduling restrictions (*optional*): _____

F. Costs will be paid as follows:

- No charge:
- Payment is ordered as follows (%): _____

G. Contact with provider:

- Mother to contact provider before (*date*): _____
- Father to contact provider before (*date*): _____

H. This matter is set for status on _____ at _____ m. in Room _____

I. The attorney for _____ shall contact the referred agency within 10 days of the entry of this order and transmit all appropriate pleadings with this order within 10 days of the entry of this order. All parties shall promptly and fully comply with the requirements of any referring agency.

Atty. Code No. _____

Name: _____

Attorney For: _____ ENTERED: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Telephone: _____

Fax: _____

Judge

Judges No.

(*If party has not disclosed an address, that party shall designate an alternative address for the purpose of notice)