

# Reading the Signs

For participants in the MNADV's Lethality Assessment Program for First Responders

## Lethality Participants

The following jurisdictions in Maryland have implemented *or will soon implement* LAP:

- Alleghany County Sheriff's Office, Cumberland PD, Frostburg PD, Frostburg State University PD, FCRC
- Baltimore City PD (North East District), House of Ruth (pilot)
- Calvert County Sheriff's Office, CIC
- Cambridge PD, Mid-Shore Council on Family Violence (MSCFV)
- Cecil County Sheriff's Office, Elkton PD, North East PD, Rising Sun PD, Perryville PD, Port Deposit PD, Family Violence Program
- Easton PD, MSCFV
- Frederick County Sheriff's Office, Frederick PD, Heartly House
- Garrett County Sheriff's Office, Dove Ctr.
- Harford County Sheriff's Office, SARC
- Kent County Sheriff's Office, MSCFV
- Prince George's County Sheriff's Office, Family Crisis Center
- Queen Anne's County Sheriff's Office, MSCFV
- Washington County Sheriff's Office, Hagerstown PD, CASA

The following agencies have committed to implementing the Lethality Assessment Program during 2007:

Anne Arundel County PD, YWCA; Caroline County CSO, Denton PD, Federalsburg PD, Ridgely PD, Greensboro PD, Preston PD; Centerville PD; Chestertown PD, Rock Hall PD; Dorchester County CSO, Hurlock PD; and Talbot County CSO, St. Michael's PD, Oxford PD, Department of Natural Resources, Westernport PD.

## About This Newsletter

This newsletter is a product of the Maryland Lethality Assessment Participants' Committee (LAPC). The Committee, which is coordinated by the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence, monitors the domestic violence Lethality Assessment Program (LAP) in Maryland and sets the standards for it. The Committee consists of agencies and providers participating in the LAP and others who have been involved in its development.

## Participants' Meeting Held in Hagerstown

The third meeting of the statewide Lethality Assessment Participants' Committee (LAPC) took place on September 20, 2006 at the Washington County Sheriff's Office in Hagerstown. Twenty-three representatives of 18 agencies discussed: 1) the growth of the LAP to 15 counties by the end of 2007; 2) how jurisdictions share victim information and provide cohesive services; 3) interpretation of statistics; and 4) what additional actions programs and agencies are taking to guard against domestic violence deaths.

## The Woodring Case and Lessons Learned



Just from news accounts of the tragic shooting death of Bonnie Woodring by her husband in a NC domestic violence shelter on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, we can identify critical lethality factors that clearly show Ms. Woodring was at great risk of being killed. Is it a given that her death could not have been prevented "when you have someone who is determined and who has such a twisted obsession," as one account noted of her abuser? No. We can be in a position to prevent deaths because we have the prevention tools. The LAP not only enables us to assess if a victim is in danger of death, but it puts us in a better position to offer the victim safety. Program services are crucial for high danger victims and one aspect of victim safety should be to account for the abuser's actions. The LAP protocol offers a list of intervention measures. Providing enhanced services and proactive accountability are defenses against another tragic death.

## The Protocol

**Make a phone call to the domestic violence program in ALL high danger cases...**even if the victim initially declines to speak with a counselor.

In such cases, inform the victim that you're going to speak with the counselor to seek advice on how to handle the victim's situation and that you would like the victim to think about speaking with the counselor when you finish.



## The 1-2-3s of a High Danger Screen

1. The victim is in **danger of death**.
2. The abuser is **highly dangerous**.
3. Treat both of these factors **seriously** and **separately!**

## Meeting Outcomes

### The Tally

In Kent, Queen Anne's, Harford, Garrett, Washington and Calvert Counties, and the cities of Baltimore, Cambridge, Easton and Hagerstown between April 1 and July 30, 2006:

- **498** screens were administered.
  - **275** victims screened in at high danger (55%).
  - **148** of those who screened in at high danger spoke with a counselor (54%).
  - **46** of those who spoke with a counselor sought services (31%).
- This is an all-time high!**

**The Most Important Number: 0 Homicides**

### Can We Improve?

Yes, we can improve! If, as officers, we try harder to encourage victims to speak on the phone with a counselor *and* if, as counselors, we try harder to encourage the victims to use our services.



### Doing More to Prevent Deaths: Best Practices

- ⇒ **Washington County Sheriff's Office (WCSO) and CASA**-After receiving a high danger screen, **Investigator Mark Price** and a counselor will follow up with a visit to the victim's home or other safe location to speak with her.
- ⇒ **Hagerstown PD-Detective Sergeant Steve Hoover** contacts victims on an on-going basis.
- ⇒ **SARC-Fatima Burns** contacts victims who have indicated in the protocol referral that they are interested in services. It may be for this reason why victims in Harford County sought services at a 47% rate. Fatima makes the calls from a safe line or fax line to maintain victim safety.
- ⇒ **WCSO** contacts Parole and Probation whenever an abuser on probation has violated a protective order.
- ⇒ **Harford County Sheriff's Office-Corporal Tracey Farmer** noted that supervisors monitor lethality screen compliance closely and require one when not initially done.

**Consider:** Initiating screens when interim and temporary protective orders are issued.

**Consider:** Having programs hire or appoint a law enforcement coordinator as the Mid-Shore Council on Family Violence and the Cecil County Family Violence Center have done.



### Administrative Checklist

- Are all **applicable boxes** on the lethality screen being checked off?
- Is the program **hotline number printed** on the bottom of the lethality screen form? Having the number on the form makes it easier for officers to call the hotline.
- Do officers have **enough forms on hand?** They need the lethality screens readily available in order to initiate a screen.

**Consider:** Keeping L.A. stats beyond one year.

**Consider:** Retraining or reminders.

### Take Two

Here's a **less-than-two-minute "reminder" training** that can be presented to officers verbally or in writing:

*"We participate in the Lethality Assessment Program. In those domestic violence cases in which you are responding to an intimate partner situation and: (1) you believe an assault has occurred; (2) the location is a repeat address; or (3) you instinctively feel the situation is dangerous, initiate a Lethality Screen. (If you are giving an oral presentation, hold up the screen and ask everyone if they have ample copies.) If a victim answers 'yes' to enough questions, inform her that:*

- *People are killed in situations similar to hers;*
- *You are going to call the domestic violence hotline for advice (the number is on the screen); and*
- *You would like her to speak with the counselor when you finish.*

*If, at first, she says she doesn't want to speak with a counselor, encourage her to reconsider. The victim's best chance of survival—and the main objective of the program—is to have her receive the services she needs. We haven't had a domestic violence homicide in a long time; let's try to keep it that way (or, 'we've had domestic violence homicides over the past \_\_\_\_; let's try to have none'). **In 50% of domestic violence homicides, police had previously responded to the location. Make your response count!**"*

This project was supported by 2006-WF-AX-0050, awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice. The Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, coordinates the activities of the program offices and bureaus. Points of view or opinions contained within this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. The Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention funded this project under grant number VAWA-2006-0061. All points of view in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position of any State agency.



**Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence**  
 Tel: (301)352-4574; Fax: (301)809-0422  
 Statewide Helpline: 1-800-MD-HELPS  
 Email: [info@mnadv.org](mailto:info@mnadv.org)  
 Website: [www.mnadv.org](http://www.mnadv.org)