

WASHINGTON STATE COALITION

WSCADV

AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Fatality Review Reports: Innovative Advocates Use the Reports

**Compiled by Leigh Hofheimer
For the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence**

Reprinted July 2008

WASHINGTON STATE COALITION

WSCADV

AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

1402 3rd Ave, Suite 406
Seattle, WA 98101
206.389.2415
206.389.2900 tty

711 Capitol Way S, Suite 702
Olympia, WA 98501
360.586.1022
360.586.1029 tty

This article was originally published in the November/December 2001 WSCADV Bulletin by the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. It was reviewed, updated, and reprinted July 2008.

This publication was supported by funding from the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Children's Administration, Division of Program and Policy. The points of view presented in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services.

The contents of this publication may be reprinted with permission from the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Any reprinting must be accompanied by the following acknowledgement: "This material was reprinted with permission of the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence" and must include the name of the article and the author being quoted.

Advocates Speak Up About How They Use the Fatality Review Reports in Their Daily Work

What follows are examples of ways advocates have used Fatality Review Reports in a variety of situations to educate, advocate and make change. Contact the Coalition's Fatality Review Team if you have experiences you would like to share about how you use the reports in your work.

Advocacy

All of our advocates have read the report themselves and use the information in a general way when talking with battered women on safety planning issues. It also provides data for community presentations. – *Seattle*

Asking women to sign the release form (to release information in the event of her death) can help open conversation about what kind of danger she faces from her abuser. – *Wenatchee*

Organizing Vigils

We began the march at our public library, distributing a candle and a slip of paper to each participant. The paper held a domestic violence victim's name, age, and manner in which she died. The group walked through our town to our municipal park, and gathered to hear guest speakers. One was a Coalition staff member who works on the fatality review project. Other speakers included a local female pastor (a survivor of domestic violence herself), the daughter and a close friend of Margaret Baker (a local victim shot and killed last June), and our program director. This activity prompted many inquires and comments from community members as to how they could help in the work that we do. – *White Salmon*

We use the data and details of the Fatality Review Project for our March and Vigil during Domestic Violence Awareness Month. We make a poster with the names and ages of all deaths in the past year due to DV and carry that in the march through our small town. Then at the vigil at the courthouse at the end, we light a candle for each victim as their name is called, plus one extra candle for all the deaths that were not identified as due to DV. It is a very simple but touching ceremony. – *San Juan Islands*

Working with Criminal Justice

When addressing the King County Chief's and Sheriff's Association, we have used the information to encourage the Chiefs to take the issue of DV seriously and to reinforce that training is paramount for officers to respond appropriately and enforce the laws correctly. Also with the same group, we have used it to suggest that there are now studies being conducted that will be analyzing their own agencies' responses if there is a concern by the public, so if they want to avoid being in the headlines of one of these kind of reports, they need to train and enforce correctly. In training of line officers, we use it to discuss the level of gun violence and the need to ask about weapons and be concerned for their own safety, as well as that of witnesses.

The report brought out that many female homicide victims asked for protection and that the order for protection did not protect them in the end. We encourage officers to suggest that women get protection orders, but also to make those referrals and suggest that she make a safety plan, and to be realistic with women about how long the suspect will be in jail, or how soon he could get out.

Looking at the issue of weapons confiscation, the report has given us info as to how important it is try to get weapons out of the hands of perpetrators as soon as possible. It is good information when trying to convince a judge or an officer or other criminal justice people or funding agencies that this needs to be a priority. – *Seattle*

Working with a Religious Community

Bethany Presbyterian Church is a small congregation in a poor neighborhood of Spokane, WA. We are small, but we are dedicated to social justice issues. A sign at the church says, “All are welcome, gay or straight, rich or poor, black or white—very cool!” On October 21, I had the honor of organizing the worship service with a focus on DV Awareness Month. We gathered to be in each other’s presence as we remembered, confessed, named and responded to the violence in each of our lives, our families, our churches and our communities. Five other women helped with the service through readings, playing music, and lighting candles. Some were survivors. The communion table was full of candles, gifts that I have received from survivors in my work, and a cross from El Salvador with a woman in the middle. These were all symbols of not only the tragedy of domestic violence, but also the hope, beauty and creativity in the lives of survivors.

Several members of the congregation were given a slip of paper with the names, ages, homes, and weapons used to kill women in Washington State over the past year. They stood, read their papers, and then came forward to light a candle for these women. It was through naming the real names of women and how they were killed that for many, the realness of domestic violence truly moved them. During the closing, each person came forward and collected a stone as a reminder to not only pray, but to commit themselves to helping end violence against women. – *Spokane*

“Wearing of the Hearts”

We distributed purple hearts bearing the name, age, and gender of over 400 victims of domestic violence, all from information taken from the fatality review report. Members of the community wore the hearts throughout the week of October 1-5, 2001. The hearts were then placed on white crosses during a memorial service. The crosses remained through the month of October. This program was a tremendous success and will be repeated in the future. – *Lewis County*

A Personal Impact

I’ve shared the report with the community mental health agency in our community so they can have better information about assessing clients, especially suicidal ones. But I’ve also used the information in a much more personal way.

Almost at the same time I got a copy of the Fatality Review report, my sister told me she was being harassed by her ex-boyfriend. She told me he had gotten into her apartment, and while in her apartment, he attempted suicide. When I read the fatality review, I realized this guy fit the profile. I immediately called my sister and told her about the report and its recommendations. We started following them right away. This included hooking my sister up with the battered women's services, as well as with local law enforcement.

As it now stands, it appears that things are better. My sister says her ex-boyfriend is no longer harassing her. She may well be alive today because of this report, and because we were warned to take the situation very seriously. – *Name Withheld*

Advocating with Institutions

I have talked about the report with the Seattle Police Department Chief, at King County Domestic Violence Council meetings, and other educational forums. The points I have highlighted include:

- The actual numbers of homicides,
- The findings about suicide and DV homicide and how unable the system is to deal with it,
- How outstanding warrants on the victim hampered their ability to be safe,
- How women's marginalization further endangered them, and
- How often neighbors, friends and/or family members knew the abuse was happening, but did not do anything to intervene.

We are also using it as a model for the victim-defendant project – both the actual information and how the information is presented. The fatality review report is an invaluable tool for education, advocacy, and public policy development. – *Seattle*