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## INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

**TO:** State, Tribal and Territorial Agencies Administering or Supervising the Administration of Titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act, Indian Tribes and Indian Tribal Organizations and Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act Formula and Discretionary Grantees

**SUBJECT:** Domestic Violence Awareness Month: Opportunities for Prevention and Action

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this information memorandum (IM) is to provide Administration for Children and Families (ACF) agencies and grantees with information about domestic violence training, resources, and partners because every ACF agency has an important role in helping families struggling with domestic violence. The intent of this IM is to help victims of domestic violence and their children. This IM is released in partnership with the Family and Youth Services Bureau, Division of Family Violence Prevention and Services celebrating 30 years as the primary federal stream for domestic violence shelters, supportive services, and the national domestic violence hotline ([www.acf.hhs.gov/fvpsa](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/fvpsa)).

**BACKGROUND:** One in 4 women have experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner, while 1 in 7 men have experienced the same (e.g., hit with a fist or something hard, beaten, slammed against something) at some point in their lifetime.<sup>1</sup> Federal programs, supported by the Administration for Children and Families provide life-saving services and supports to victims of domestic violence and their children. Efforts to eliminate poverty, increase self-sufficiency of individuals and families, and revitalize communities are also directly related to the prevention and reduction of domestic violence. Here are some key facts:

- Millions of children and adolescents are exposed to violence in their homes, schools, and communities, as both victims and witnesses, each year in the United States.<sup>2</sup>
- Over the course of a lifetime, **more than half** of youth who witness partner violence also experience child maltreatment.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness*, U.S. Conference of Mayors (2012).

<sup>2</sup> Finkelhor, D., Turner, H., Ormrod, R., Hamby, S., & Kracke, K. (October 2009). *Children's exposure to violence: A comprehensive national survey*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

- On average between 2001 and 2005, children were residents of the households experiencing intimate partner violence in **38%** of the incidents involving female victims and **21%** of the incidents involving male victims.<sup>4</sup>
- Children exposed to domestic violence have often been found to develop a wide range of problems including interpersonal skill deficits, psychological and emotional problems such as depression and PTSD, and externalizing behavior problems.<sup>5</sup>
- Domestic violence is the **third** leading cause of homelessness among families in the U.S.<sup>6</sup>
- **47%** of homeless school-aged children and **29%** of homeless children under five have witnessed domestic violence in their families.<sup>7</sup>
- Many adults first experience violence as children. Millions of children and adolescents are exposed to violence in their homes, schools, and communities, as both victims and witnesses, each year in the United States.<sup>8</sup>
- Supporting children's healthy attachment to a survivor-parent is crucial to their development and resiliency following exposure to domestic violence.<sup>9</sup>

October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month, which is recognized by advocates, service providers, and communities all across the United States. This October, we invite you to stand with concerned citizens, service providers, and domestic violence survivors to inform your agency's employees and partners about what they can do to prevent and end domestic violence and, and to celebrate the advancement of community responses. This October represents an opportunity to ensure that health and human service providers supported by ACF have the capacity to:

- Recognize the impact of domestic violence;
- Respond effectively with trauma-informed strategies;
- Safely link families to domestic violence services; and
- Promote prevention programs

Within the child welfare population, we know there is a considerable amount of co-occurrence of child maltreatment and domestic violence. According to Child Maltreatment 2012, based upon

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<sup>3</sup> Hamby, S., Finkelhor, D., Turner, H., & Ormrod, R. (2010). The overlap of witnessing partner violence with child maltreatment and other victimizations in a nationally representative survey of youth. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 34(10), 734-741.

<sup>4</sup> Catalano, S. (2007). *Intimate partner violence in the United States*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

<sup>5</sup> Carlson, B. E. (2000). Children exposed to intimate partner violence: Research findings and implications for intervention. *Trauma, Violence and Abuse*, 1(4), 321-342.

<sup>6</sup> *Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness*, U.S. Conference of Mayors (2012).

<sup>7</sup> *Homeless in America: A Children's Story*, Part One Homes for the Homeless & Institute for Children and Poverty, 23 (1999).

<sup>8</sup> Finkelhor, D., Turner, H., Ormrod, R., Hamby, S., & Kracke, K. (October 2009). *Children's exposure to violence: A comprehensive national survey*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<sup>9</sup> Warshaw, C. (2014). Thinking about trauma in the context of domestic violence: An integrated framework. *Synergy*, 17 (FVPSA/OVW Anniversary Special Issue 1 of 2), 2-7.

the 35 states that report on the domestic violence risk factor, 28.5 percent of victims and 8.6 percent of nonvictims were exposed to domestic violence. In addition, some states were able to report on whether certain caregiver risk factors contributed to a child fatality. Thirty-one states reported that 20.1 percent of child fatalities were exposed to domestic violence in the home<sup>10</sup>. These data indicate an urgent need for the work of our agencies and grantees to reflect an understanding of this co-occurrence.

Additionally, it is important to note that children exposed to domestic violence are affected differently, often based upon gender, age, existing protective factors and other contextual factors. These effects can be experienced immediately within the situation, as on-going effects in childhood and adolescence, and as long-term effects experienced into adulthood. Specific effects can include impacts to behavioral and emotional functioning, increased aggressive and antisocial behavior, fearful and inhibited behaviors, and poor academic performance.<sup>11</sup> To better serve these vulnerable children and families we encourage commitment to understanding and collaboration to address the intersection of these two very complex, and often co-occurring issues that face many of the families we encounter.

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR PREVENTION AND ACTION**

There are several key steps that Children's Bureau funded state, local and community agencies, as well as formula and discretionary grantees can take to support families impacted by domestic violence. We encourage agencies and grantees to create opportunities and strategies that inform and train staff about domestic violence and its impacts on the children, families, and communities they serve and what staff can do to assist these vulnerable children and families. Agencies and grantees are also encouraged to look for opportunities to collaborate with state, local and community organizations within the domestic violence field (i.e. state coalitions, local shelters and advocacy organizations, offender treatment programs and other domestic violence agencies) to explore cross-system training opportunities, improve communication and identify areas for improved service delivery to better connect families to key domestic violence services. To achieve these key steps, below is additional information and resources to assist agencies and grantees.

### **Connect Victims of Domestic Violence to Services**

Children's Bureau funded state, local and community agencies, as well as formula and discretionary grantees should make every effort to assist families and children who are experiencing domestic violence by sharing national, state and local hotline numbers for local domestic violence intervention programs, either directly or posting in public spaces that are frequented by staff and families. Children's Bureau regional administrators are encouraged to share this information with state, local and community agencies, as well as formula grantees, for example, by distributing the domestic violence resources listed below with agencies so they may

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<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. (2013). *Child maltreatment 2012*. Available from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/child-maltreatment>.

<sup>11</sup> Edleson, J. (2011). *Emerging Responses to Children Exposed to Domestic Violence*. Harrisburg, PA: The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence.

share with their provider networks. Knowing who to call when a safety plan is needed is important to reducing the fear and isolation for families impacted by domestic violence.

### **National Hotlines**

Free and confidential help is available for victims of domestic violence 24 hours a day. These hotlines can help victims of domestic violence and sexual violence find support and assistance in their communities:

- **National Domestic Violence Hotline - 1-800-799-7233**
- **National Dating Abuse Helpline - 1-866-331-9474**
- **National Sexual Assault Hotline (RAINN) - 1-800-656-4673**

### **Partner with Community Based Domestic Violence Programs**

Domestic Violence Awareness Month provides a great time for Children's Bureau funded state, local and community agencies, as well as formula and discretionary grantees to develop or reinvest in community partnerships with domestic violence providers who have expertise in helping victims of domestic violence. Investing in meaningful training and technical assistance partnerships is critical to supporting the families that are accessing Children's Bureau funded services and programs. Domestic violence coalitions, local domestic violence shelter programs, tribal domestic violence programs, and culturally specific community based organizations are an integral part of any coordinated health care and social service response to domestic violence.

To meet the needs of adults and children experiencing domestic violence, Children's Bureau funded state, local and community agencies, as well as formula and discretionary grantees can partner with organizations such as state domestic violence coalitions, local domestic violence and sexual assault service programs, shelter programs, transitional and long-term housing assistance providers, and/or offender' intervention programs. These providers may offer direct services to families and children or important in-service trainings that could be developed specifically to address how domestic violence impacts the families accessing Children's Bureau funded services and programs.

Each State, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and American Samoa, has a FVPSA funded Domestic Violence Coalition. These coalitions are connected to more than 2,000 local domestic violence programs receiving FVPSA funding across this country. Every Coalition provides comprehensive training and technical assistance on a multitude of social, legal, and economic issues that affect victims' safety and well-being. Coalitions partner with government, private industry, non-profit and faith-based communities, and other stakeholders to effectively coordinate and improve the safety-net of services available to victims and their dependents.

We encourage you to establish meaningful partnerships with domestic violence coalitions for training, problem solving service barriers, domestic violence assessment implementation, establishing referral protocols with local domestic violence programs, and featuring domestic violence discussions at upcoming conferences.

The domestic violence coalition working with programs in your community can be found at the: <http://www.vawnet.org/links/state-coalitions.php>. Additional information about the Family Violence Prevention and Services Programs Domestic Violence Coalitions can be found at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/resource/dvcoalitions>.

### **Learn More About Domestic Violence Resources**

We are asking Children's Bureau funded state, local and community agencies, as well as formula and discretionary grantees to ensure that every staff person visits an online domestic violence resource center, and/or participate in domestic violence training, or an awareness event this October.

**Domestic Violence: Understanding the Basics**, is an online learning tool developed by FVPSA grantee, the **National Resource Center on Domestic Violence** and **VAWnet**, the National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women. This 1-hour interactive eLearning module describes the dynamics and common tactics that characterize domestic violence, provides an overview of the scope and impact on individuals and society, explores the underlying factors that allow domestic violence to exist, offers insight into the various risks and choices that survivors face, and shares how to be part of the solution. Divided into 10 sections that address common questions related to domestic violence, this self-guided online course will help new advocates, allied professionals, students, volunteers and the general public achieves a basic understanding of the complexities of this issue.

### **Additional Online Domestic Violence Resources**

- Promising Futures Without Violence developed by FVPSA grantee Futures Without Violence, is an online resource center for best practices for serving children, youth and parents experiencing domestic violence. This website houses evidence based interventions, program models, training curriculum and tools focused on safe services that build resilience and competence in children and parents impacted by domestic violence. <http://promising.futureswithoutviolence.org/>
- The **Domestic Violence Evidence Project** developed by FVPSA grantee the **National Resource Center on Domestic Violence** houses a comprehensive evidence review of domestic violence core services, programs, and innovative practices. <http://www.dvevidenceproject.org>
- **Trauma-Informed Domestic Violence Services** is a 3-part **VAWnet** Special Collection Series reflecting an integrated perspective that incorporates an understanding of the pervasiveness and impact of trauma; supports healing and resiliency; and addresses the root causes of abuse and violence. This Special Collection was developed by FVPSA grantees the **National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health** in partnership with the **National Resource Center on Domestic Violence**. <http://www.vawnet.org/special-collections/DVTraumaInformed-Overview>

### **Culturally Specific Resources**

There is a national network of organizations that address the impact of domestic violence and implement culturally relevant trauma-informed services for ethnic and racially specific communities. These organizations work to increase access to services through training and technical assistance; produce culturally relevant tools for advocates and practitioners; conduct culturally relevant research; and strengthen partnerships between culturally specific organizations and main stream service providers include statewide service implementation and language access planning.

- Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community, [www.dvinstitute.org](http://www.dvinstitute.org)
- Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network of Healthy Families and Communities, [www.casadeesperanza.org/national-latino-network](http://www.casadeesperanza.org/national-latino-network)
- Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence, [www.apiidv.org](http://www.apiidv.org)
- Women of Color Network, <http://womenofcolornetwork.org/>

### **National and Special Issue Domestic Violence Resources**

There is a national network of organizations that address the impact of domestic violence and dating violence within specific issue areas such as health, mental health, substance abuse, child protection, and legal services. These organizations work to increase access to services through training and technical assistance; produce tools for advocates and practitioners; conduct research; and partner with agencies to increase their overall capacity to support individuals and families impacted by domestic violence.

- National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, [www.nrcdv.org](http://www.nrcdv.org) and [www.vawnet.org](http://www.vawnet.org)
- National Indigenous Women's Resource Center, [www.niwrc.org](http://www.niwrc.org)
- National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health, [www.nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org](http://www.nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org)
- National Health Resource Center on Domestic Violence, [www.futureswithoutviolence.org](http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org)
- Resource Center on Domestic Violence, Child Protection and Custody, [www.ncjfcj.org/dept/fvd](http://www.ncjfcj.org/dept/fvd)
- Battered Women's Justice Project: Criminal and Civil Justice Center, [www.bwjp.org](http://www.bwjp.org)

We all know that collective action is needed to ensure appropriate responses and support for all families struggling with domestic violence. It is important for all ACF programs to partner with individuals, families, and communities to end domestic violence. This October brings opportunities to not only build on the Department of Health and Human Services' 30 year legacy of partnering with communities to address domestic violence through the implementation of the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act. It presents opportunities for stronger partnerships focused on building futures without violence for the thousands of families we serve every day.

Thank you for your dedication and commitment to supporting all children and families.

Please direct any questions on this Information Memorandum to:

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Attachment: Children's Bureau Regional Program Managers

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Mark Greenberg  
Acting Commissioner, ACYF

/s/

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