



**FAMILY VIOLENCE SEMIPOSTAL STAMP:  
ENHANCING SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND  
YOUTH WHO ARE EXPOSED TO DOMESTIC  
VIOLENCE**

**Report to Congress**

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
Administration for Children and Families  
Administration on Children, Youth, and Families  
Family and Youth Services Bureau**

# **Report to Congress on the Family Violence Semipostal Stamp: Enhancing Services for Children and Youth Who Are Exposed to Domestic Violence**

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## I. Introduction

The Stamp Out Family Violence Act of 2001, Public Law (P.L.) 107-67, § 653 directs the United States Postal Service (USPS) to issue a “semipostal” stamp to “provide the public a direct and tangible way to contribute to funding for domestic violence programs” and to transfer the proceeds from stamp sales to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to carry out the purposes of the Act. The Administration for Children and Families (ACF), DHHS was designated to administer the Stamp Act funds for support of services to children and youth affected by domestic violence through its Family Violence Prevention and Services Program, Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB). ACF submits this Report to Congress in compliance with the requirements of the Semipostal Authorization Act, P.L. 106-253, to report on the funding received through the semipostal stamp program, how those funds were allocated and used, and the significant advances or accomplishments that were achieved.

ACF administers the Family Violence Prevention and Treatment Act (FVPSA) which provides grants to increase public awareness about and prevent family violence and to provide immediate shelter and related assistance for victims of family violence and their dependents. Each year, FVPSA grants to States and Territories support over 1,500 community-based domestic violence programs which provide emergency shelter and related assistance for over 119,000 victims of domestic violence and 120,900 children. FVPSA-funded domestic violence programs also respond to over 1.4 million calls to crisis hotlines each year. The vast majority of victims who contact domestic violence programs do not need or request emergency shelter. Rather, they are seeking assistance planning for their safety, support groups or individual counseling, advocacy, or services for their children.

It is estimated that from 10% to 20% of American children, approximately 7 to 14 million, are exposed to domestic violence each year.<sup>1</sup> Children who witness domestic violence are at a greater risk of developing psychiatric disorders, developmental problems, school failure, and low self-esteem.<sup>2</sup> Other studies have found that children who witness domestic violence in their homes are more likely to justify their own use of violence in relationships.<sup>3</sup> Domestic violence programs have expanded their efforts to address the needs of children and youth affected by domestic violence work by working with battered parents and their children to reinforce resiliency, enhance parents’ caregiving capacity, and to promote family healing and support. However, professionals working in domestic violence programs, child protection and community based programs serving victims of domestic violence and their children need assessment tools and practice models to guide their efforts.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</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; Edleson, J.L., Ellerton, A.L., Seagren, E.A., Kirchberg, S.L., Schmidt, S.O., Ambrose, A.T. (2007). Assessing Child Exposure to Adult Domestic Violence. *Children and Youth Services Review*, In Press.

<sup>2</sup> Nelson, H.D., Nygren, P., McInerney, Y., Klein, J. (2004). Screening women and elderly adults for family and intimate partner violence: A review of evidence for the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 140(5):387-96.

<sup>3</sup> Singer et al., (1998); Jaffe et al., (1998).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. See Note 1.

To meet the need for effective practice models and enhanced services, ACF distributed the funds generated by the Family Violence Stamp to award grants for the *Demonstration of Enhanced Services to Children and Youth Who Have Been Exposed to Domestic Violence*.

## II. Proceeds from the Family Violence Stamp

Semipostal stamps generate funding for designated purposes by selling the stamp for the price of a first class stamp plus a differential. A semipostal stamp is valid for postage at the first-class rate, with the difference between the sale price and the normal first class postage rate consisting of a tax-deductible contribution by the purchaser. The USPS sold the Family Violence Stamp (see Appendix A) for 45 cents from October 2003 through December 2006. The revenue from the semipostal stamp sales was distributed to DHHS beginning in May 2004, with the final allotment of funds anticipated in May 2007. To date, USPS Family Violence Stamp sales have generated \$3,030,072 to support domestic violence programs administered by DHHS.

### Annual Proceeds from Family Violence Stamp Sales

Fiscal Year	Funds Generated
2004	\$ 767,279
2005	\$1,031,853
2006	\$ 913,073
2007	\$ 317,867 <sup>5</sup>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,030,072<sup>6</sup></b>

## III. Allocation of Family Violence Stamp Proceeds: Demonstration of Enhanced Services to Children and Youth Who Have Been Exposed to Domestic Violence Grants

On June 8, 2005, ACF published a funding opportunity announcement entitled, “Demonstration of Enhanced Services to Children and Youth Who Have Been Exposed to Domestic Violence.” Sixty-five applicants responded to the announcement, and nine applicants were selected to receive three-year grant awards funded by the semi-postal stamp proceeds. From fiscal year 2005 through fiscal year 2007, each grantee will receive annual awards of approximately \$130,000.

### a. Grant Recipients and Annual Awards

Grantee	Location	Annual Award
East Bay Community Foundation	Oakland, California	\$129,761
Women’s Crisis and Family Outreach Center	Castle Rock, CO	\$130,000
District of Columbia Department of Human	Washington, DC	\$130,000

<sup>5</sup> The final Fiscal Year 2007 payment from the U.S. Postal Service is expected in May, 2007 and is not included in this amount.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Services		
Department of Human Services	Lansing, MI	\$129,150
New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence	Albany, NY	\$130,000
Oklahoma Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault	Oklahoma City, OK	\$130,000
Womenspace, Inc.	Eugene, OR	\$130,000
Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence	Harrisburg, PA	\$130,000
Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance	Richmond, VA	\$129,056
<b>Total Annual Grant Awards</b>		<b>\$1,167,967</b>

Grant awards support efforts to identify, design and test approaches for providing enhanced and direct services for the children of abused parents being served in domestic violence programs or to develop an expanded capacity to work within community collaborations and systems responding to children exposed to domestic violence. The eligible project activities under the *Demonstration of Enhanced Services to Children and Youth Who Have Been Exposed to Domestic Violence* grants program are as follows:

- Provide specialized age- and culturally-appropriate services and support services for children in shelter as well as to the abused parent, related to their role as parent;
- Provide collaborative prevention/intervention services for children who have been exposed to domestic violence;
- Provide training to service providers to effectively deliver services to children who have been exposed;
- Develop processes to ensure the confidentiality of information shared by adult victims of domestic violence and their children;
- Design and provide specific services that are responsive to the needs of children who have witnessed domestic violence, to include respite care, mental health care, counseling, child care, transportation, education, legal advocacy, and supervised visitation;
- Provide necessary linkages and cooperation with other helping systems and agencies to promote services and safety for children and the adult victim; and
- Develop and provide age appropriate educational materials for intervention and prevention services for children who have been exposed to domestic violence.

**b. Project Summaries**

A brief description of each of the funded projects appears below.

*East Bay Community Foundation, Oakland, CA*

The Safe Passages project researches, develops, implements and evaluates violence prevention and intervention strategies for children and youth, with a focus on children from zero to age five

and their primary caregivers. The East Bay Community Foundation works in partnership with the City of Oakland, the County of Alameda, Oakland Unified School District and community-based organizations to reduce youth violence in Oakland by changing the way public systems and community-based organizations work together. The project's goals are to: expand mental health consultation to domestic violence shelters; increase use of the violence prevention curriculum, Second Step – Committee for Children; and, enhance coordination of services for children exposed to domestic violence. The project has expanded previous violence prevention efforts by offering Second Step in preschools, Head Start Centers and in domestic violence shelters to enhance parent and child skills and awareness. The project also has broadened the scope of mental health services available to ethnically and culturally diverse families with young children who are experiencing domestic violence. In home-based and shelter settings, project staff offer child assessment and intervention, parent support, and case consultation and training for shelter staff working with children experiencing domestic violence.

*Women's Crisis and Family Outreach Center, Castle Rock, CO*

The *Alliance*, led by Women's Crisis and Family Outreach Center, is a collaboration which includes the Colorado Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV), non-profit batterer treatment programs and mental health networks, and the local and state Departments of Human Service. They have strengthened the network of systems that intersect with children who witness domestic violence, providing a continuum of care and resources for the children and their mothers. The *Alliance* has improved direct services for children and their families by: supporting a group for adolescent boys who have witnessed their mothers being abused and are showing signs of battering behavior; using assessment tools throughout treatment to measure the extent of trauma that children have experienced and track changes in their well-being; and, involving mothers in the therapy process to build appropriate parenting skills and promote understanding about their child's treatment. Finally, the (CCADV) has provided training for agencies throughout the state on the impact on children of witnessing domestic violence.

*District of Columbia Department of Human Services, Washington, DC*

The *DC Kids Project* of the Department of Human Services Strong Families Program works to minimize the impact of domestic violence on children in families receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families by empowering their non-abusing parents. In partnership with the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency, Women Empowered Against Violence, and community based shelter programs, the *DC Kids Project* provides case management, assessment, workshops at shelters in the District of Columbia, and therapeutic and recreational activities for families who have experienced violence in their homes. Workshop participants learn about the dynamics of domestic violence and safety planning skills for adults and children.

*Department of Human Services, Lansing, MI*

The *Kids Exposed to Domestic Violence* project of the Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board is organized through a multi-disciplinary statewide steering committee to improve community responses to battered women and their children. Beginning with supervised visitation centers and child welfare agencies in the pilot communities of Muskegon and Port Huron, services for children who witness domestic violence and their non-offending parents have been expanded to include voluntary, free individual and group counseling, advocacy, and referrals. Counselors trained in understanding the intersection of domestic violence and child

welfare, also work with parents (usually mothers) to restore, if necessary, the mother-child relationship. The work initiated in the pilot communities will serve as a model for the rest of the state for improving cross-system referrals and offering tailored, accessible services for children who have been affected by domestic violence and their parents.

*New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Albany (NYSCADV), NY*

The NYSCADV is coordinating the *Supervised Visitation: Enhancing Services to Children and Youth Who Are Affected by Domestic Violence* project in partnership with the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the State Office for Children and Family Services, and Oswego County Opportunities (OCO), a Community Action Agency in upstate NY. Project staff work with children and youth exposed to domestic violence, their non-offending custodial parents and visiting parties at supervised visitation centers operated by the partner agencies. The project has dual goals of offering safety, services and support to children, youth and their adult caregivers, and increasing the capacity of supervised visitation centers to support families where there has been a history of domestic violence. The project supports a child advocate to check in with children, assess their resiliency and engage them in safety planning. In addition, project personnel provide technical assistance and develop evaluation/assessment tools and protocols, hold staff development activities, expand visitation center hours of operation, and disseminate domestic violence resources. The project partners seek to develop a best practice model of supervised visitation that provides appropriate services to families affected by domestic violence.

*Oklahoma Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (OCADVSA), Oklahoma City, OK*

The *Collaborative Children's Services Project* is led by OCADVSA and the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center in partnership with the Office of the Attorney General, the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, the Spirits of Hope Native American Coalition and domestic violence and sexual assault victim service providers. The project's goal is to enhance the quality of children's services provided by Oklahoma domestic violence programs by designing and testing a psychoeducational intervention for child domestic violence shelter residents and their female caregivers. Project staff conducted statewide focus groups with shelter staff and former clients to assess shelter services and continuing education needs, and are developing the child and caregiver intervention, the revision of state children's domestic violence services standards, and training curricula for child domestic violence advocates. The project also will include an outcome study on the efficacy of the intervention model in improving the lives of children exposed to domestic violence.

*Womenspace, Inc., Eugene, OR*

The *Open Arms* project at the Womenspace domestic violence program works in partnership with the Relief Nursery for children, and the Looking Glass and Ophelia's Place programs that serve youth and their families. The partnering agencies are building trust, increasing referrals and improving support for families by offering complementary services for those experiencing domestic violence. The project has enhanced several shelter-based and community-based services including: counseling to strengthen mother-child attachment and minimize the effects of trauma; youth advocacy; parenting classes; and, recreational activities. The project-supported Youth Advocate shelter organizes family activities such as family cooking evenings and informal parent training. Parents involved in these activities are increasingly participating in support

groups and parenting classes. Project staff report that the *Open Arms* collaboration is becoming a “source of growth, renewal, and positive direction in the lives of our mothers and their children.”

*Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV), Harrisburg, PA*

The PCADV is partnering with the Pennsylvania Office of Children, Youth and Families, the Child Witness to Violence Project and researchers at Michigan State University to expand the capacity of domestic violence advocates to identify and address the unique needs of children and youth exposed to domestic violence and their non-abusive parents. Project staff are developing a 12-week home or community based program to strengthen the mother-child relationship by helping non-abusive parents to better understand child development, age-appropriate behaviors, behaviors resulting from exposure to domestic violence, and strategies to address the needs of their children. Five demonstration sites have received extensive training and technical assistance to help them implement the new user-friendly resource materials and home-based services. The project evaluator will assess the effectiveness of the training and lessons learned from the pilots prior to replication in domestic violence programs across the state.

*Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance (VSDVAA), Richmond, VA*

The VSDVAA, and their partners in the Virginia and Montgomery County Departments of Social Service, and local domestic violence and legal advocacy programs, focused their project on improving the responses of statewide domestic violence programs and child protective service workers to children, youth and non-abusing parents who have been exposed to domestic violence. Project staff conducted a needs assessment with domestic violence programs to identify gaps, develop strategies, and assess program capacity. The project will provide training for child protection workers and for all domestic violence advocates who provide direct services to children, youth and their parents. Training will focus on providing age and culturally appropriate responses to children exposed to domestic violence. Partnering domestic violence programs will implement and test the service enhancement strategies. Lessons learned from the pilot sites will guide the development of comprehensive service models, and inform the development of certification standards for responding to children, youth and non-abusing parents in domestic violence programs throughout the state.

**c. Project Support and Technical Assistance**

In March and November, 2006, the Family Violence Prevention and Services Program convened the *Enhanced Services to Children and Youth Who Have Been Exposed to Domestic Violence* grantees in St. Louis Missouri. The meetings focused on the projects’ identified technical assistance needs and on cross-training among the project sites. To support the projects’ efforts to enhance services for children in shelter settings and community-based programs, the meetings included training and facilitated discussions on working across disciplines to provide collaborative services and techniques for working with families experiencing trauma. Representatives from the network of national resource centers and culturally-specific institutes on domestic violence that are supported by the Family Violence Prevention and Services Program gave an overview of the technical assistance, training and consultation they can offer to the sites. In addition, the projects made presentations on their activities and generated cross-site problem solving discussions and resource sharing (e.g., intervention models, training curricula,

and assessment tools). Ongoing technical assistance for the sites will include support for a list-serve, regular conference calls, an annual all-site technical assistance meeting, and identification of promising practices emerging from the projects.

#### **d. Project Advances and Accomplishments**

As the Enhanced Services to Children and Youth Who Have Been Exposed to Domestic Violence grantees began their second year of funding for the three year grants, they reported significant progress toward achieving their project goals in three areas:

- Expanding the capacity of domestic violence programs to address the needs of children and adolescents coming into emergency shelters;
- Expanding the capacity of domestic violence programs to address the needs of non-sheltered families and their children; and
- Developing and enhancing community-based interventions for children exposed to domestic violence whose parents have not sought services or support from a domestic violence program.

#### **Expanding the Capacity of Domestic Violence Programs to Address the Needs of Children and Adolescents**

Each day, domestic violence shelters throughout the country serve as many children as they do adult victims of domestic violence. For several years, these programs have worked to expand their capacity to meet the needs of children and youth by staffing child advocate positions, children's programs, child care services, and therapeutic services for children. However, domestic violence programs face severe resource limitations and many struggle to sustain dedicated staff for children's services. Gaps in service can be particularly acute for teenage children from homes where domestic violence occurs. The domestic violence field is in need of comprehensive, tested, and age- and culturally appropriate models for intervention with children who have been exposed to domestic violence and their non-offending parents.

To address this need, several projects are working to develop staff training, intervention models, and program standards. Examples of the working developments are as follows:

##### **Intervention Strategies for Children Exposed to Domestic Violence and Their Parents**

Grantees are developing a variety of intervention strategies for the families they serve in both shelter and non-shelter settings. Project staff have conducted needs assessments with domestic violence program providers and shelter residents, and consulted the research on the needs of children exposed to domestic violence and their parents to design responsive interventions. Throughout the three year grant period, these interventions are being implemented and tested for effectiveness and possible replication.

- In Oklahoma, the Collaborative Children's Service Project is designing and testing a psychoeducational intervention for child domestic violence shelter residents and their female caregivers. The two-session intervention for children and their caregivers focuses on normalizing children's reactions to traumatic events, reinforcing the child/family coping and safety planning skills, increasing caregivers' understanding of

the impact of witnessing violence, and giving adults strategies for supporting their children.

- The Pennsylvania project is developing home-based services to provide more extended support for families. The project designed a 12-week intervention focused on strengthening mother-child relationships by helping non-abusive parents to better understand child development, age-appropriate behaviors, behaviors resulting from exposure to domestic violence, and strategies to address the impact on the needs of their children, both short and long term.
- In Oakland, the project is expanding the availability of shelter-based and community-based mental health services by offering mental health consultations to shelter staff, and mental health interventions for families.
- The Oregon Open Arms project also is expanding the reach of their counseling program by providing community-based and home-based support for families who are transitioning to independence from their abusers. Project support also has allowed the Womenspace shelter to create a youth advocate position to enhance recreational and therapeutic opportunities for children and families.
- Based upon the results of a survey of domestic violence program staff, the Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance Advisory Council developed a menu of strategies to enhance shelter and community-based services for children and youth exposed to domestic violence and their non-abusing parents. Programs involved in their pilot project will implement and test one or more of these strategies:
  - A mini-mentoring program for children and youth in shelter and for the six-month transitional period following shelter;
  - A support and education group for teen mothers who were exposed to domestic violence as children or in their teen relationships;
  - Staff and volunteer guidelines for providing interactive, age- and culturally appropriate, individualized safety planning for children in shelter;
  - A model for trauma informed advocacy services for children and youth;
  - Support and education groups for parents and children that focus on specific age groups or underserved populations;
  - A model for advocacy related to child custody, support and visitation with staff training on the advocate's role in addressing these issues; and
  - An age-appropriate, multicultural information packet and advocate's guide for use in educating parents of children exposed to domestic violence on safety planning with their children.

#### Training for Domestic Violence Program Staff

Several projects are enhancing the capacity of domestic violence shelter staff and community agencies by offering training to raise awareness and improve responses to children's exposure to domestic violence. In Virginia and Oklahoma, project sites conducted needs assessments to determine the training needs of domestic violence shelter staff and are designing staff development to meet those needs. In Colorado, the Alliance is providing training for agencies

throughout the state on the impact on children of witnessing domestic violence. Each of the projects is developing materials and training to prepare staff to offer new shelter- and community-based interventions. In addition, the projects in Oklahoma and Virginia are reviewing and developing revisions for the state standards for shelter services for children.

### **Enhancing community-based interventions for children exposed to domestic violence**

A primary goal of the grantees is to offer improved services to children and families exposed to domestic violence in community-based settings. Families attending mainstream services, such as mental health, child protection and supervised visitation services are often struggling with the impact of domestic violence in their homes. But, without training and targeted interventions, professional responses may not address the safety and trauma-informed services these families need. Several projects are collaborating with community partners to offer targeted services in the systems and agencies where families are being served.

- In Oakland, New Beginnings is offering diversity competency training for mental health therapists to increase sensitivity to the needs of ethnically and culturally diverse children who are exposed to violence. They also are reaching into the Oakland School District to offer their violence prevention curriculum, Second Step, for children and parents in all child development centers and Head Start Centers, as well as domestic violence shelters.
- In Colorado, the Alliance, through their partner the AMEND batterer's treatment agency, is supporting a treatment group for adolescent boys who have witnessed their mothers being abused and are showing signs of battering behavior. They are using assessment tools throughout treatment to measure the extent of trauma that children have experienced and track changes in their well-being and are involving mothers in the therapy process to build appropriate parenting skills and promote understanding about their child's treatment.
- The District of Columbia Strong Families Program offered families with sustained participation in the project an off-site family retreat that provided a relaxed and supportive environment in which families could reconnect, attend outdoor educational activities, participate in recreational therapy activities, and promote healing from the effects of domestic violence on their lives.
- In Michigan, supervised visitation centers in the pilot communities, have expanded services to include voluntary, free individual and group counseling, advocacy, and referrals for children who witness domestic violence and their non-offending parents.
- In New York, the project has dual goals of offering safety, services and support to children, youth and their adult caregivers and enhancing supervised visitation center capacity. The project supports hiring a child advocate to check in with children, assess their resiliency and engage them in safety planning. Project personnel also provide technical assistance and develop evaluation/assessment tools and protocols, hold staff development activities, and disseminate domestic violence resources.

#### **IV. Conclusions**

The Stamp Out Family Violence Act of 2001 authorized the sale of the Family Violence Stamp creating a new, but temporary source of revenue for family violence services. To date, sale of the Semipostal Family Violence Stamp has raised over \$3 million dollars, and funded projects in nine states and communities to enhance services for children and youth exposed to domestic violence, a previously under-funded and under-resourced area of family violence practice.

Initial reports from the grant projects indicate that as a result of this grant funding:

- New interventions are being tested and promising practices can be shared.
- Increased resources are making available much needed interventions for children in shelters and community settings that should mediate the impact of exposure to domestic violence and may prevent future domestic violence.
- New programs and services are reaching parents overwhelmed by legal, economic, and emotional crisis, as they struggle for stability and personal safety. With this support, they can better focus on their children's development, safety and healing, thereby strengthening the parent-child bond, which research has shown increases the resiliency of children exposed to violence.

ACF anticipates making grant awards for the third and final year in fiscal year 2007. Grant recipients will continue to receive ongoing technical assistance. In the final year of grant funding, projects will be required to assess the effectiveness of their efforts and to disseminate lessons learned, and model products and interventions for broader use in the domestic violence field and other community-based agencies.