

ADDRESSING ABUSE

Community Corrections Steps Up Response to Domestic Violence

Intimate partner domestic violence is among the most prevalent forms of violence in the U.S., resulting in nearly half a million crimes against women annually, according to data from the U.S. Department of Justice. Community corrections personnel are often involved in supervising domestic violence cases, but face many challenges. The American Probation and Parole Association, an affiliate of The Council of State Governments, recently released a set of guidelines for community corrections agencies in responding to domestic violence.

By Carrie Abner

Kristin Lardner, a talented young art student living in Boston, tried to end her relationship with Michael Cartier after he brutally beat her April 15, 1992.

A month and a half later, Lardner was dead.

Cartier, who was on probation, violated the restraining orders his ex-girlfriend and two others had against him. He shot Lardner three times in the head May 30, 1992, then ran to his apartment, where he was later found dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Lardner's father, a *Washington Post* reporter, found a "disjointed system of justice" that failed to hold Cartier accountable for his crimes and intervene to protect his victims.

George Lardner won a Pulitzer Prize for the 1993 article he wrote about his daughter's murder, and in 1995 published *The Stalking of Kristin: A Father Investigates the Murder of His Daughter*, which detailed his daughter's death.

George Lardner found the justice system failed to address Cartier's violations of probation and did not process warrants for his arrest in a timely manner. He also found the courts did not sufficiently review Cartier's lengthy criminal record.

Now, nearly two decades after Lardner's death, some jurisdictions are making changes to ensure cases like Cartier's don't fall through the cracks of the system. Community corrections in Arizona, New York and Washington—along with other agencies nationwide—are stepping up efforts in the role they must play in addressing intimate partner abuse.

But it's often a challenging job.

"Domestic violence offenders are some of the most violent, dangerous individuals under community supervision, and for too long community corrections agencies and staff have struggled to identify the best strategies for holding abusers accountable for their crimes while also working to ensure the safety and security of their victims," said Nancy Halverson, corrections unit supervisor for an adult field service unit of the Hennepin County Department of Community Corrections in Minneapolis.

Communities Making Changes

Despite these challenges, state and local community corrections agencies, in partnership with other justice agencies and community-based organizations, are taking a more active role in holding domestic violence offenders accountable for their crimes and promoting the safety of victims.

That's because community corrections personnel are on the front lines when it comes to domestic violence offenders who are out on parole or probation.





IMPACT OF THE ECONOMY ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Intimate partner domestic violence is among the most prevalent forms of violence in the U.S., resulting in nearly half a million crimes against women annually and accounting for approximately one-fifth of all violent crimes against women, according to data from the U. S. Department of Justice.

While rates of domestic violence have steadily declined since 1993, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, national and state hotlines and agencies that assist victims of domestic and sexual violence are reporting an increase in calls over the last year.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline, for instance, reported a 21 percent increase in calls for assistance in September 2008 over calls made in September 2007. According to a six-week study conducted by the hotline, 54 percent of callers reported a change in their household's financial situation over the past year—so the recent economic situation may be contributing to increased stress, and perhaps an uptick in domestic violence complaints.





APPA PUBLISHES GUIDE ON COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The American Probation and Parole Association, known as APPA—in partnership with the National Center for State Courts, the New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and the Safe Return Initiative—recently published *Community Corrections' Response to Domestic Violence: Guidelines for Practice*.

The resource, funded by a grant from the United States Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women, provides 41 research-based guidelines designed to enhance the ability of community corrections staff to understand and address intimate partner violence through effective supervision of domestic violence offenders and coordination with other justice system and community-based services.

Developed through consultation with experts from community corrections and law enforcement practitioners as well as domestic violence victim advocates,

these comprehensive guidelines offer practical guidance to probation, parole and pre-trial service agencies and staff on a broad range of topics, including:

- Professionalism and Ethical Practice
- Case Investigation
- Community Supervision and Enforcement
- Victim Safety and Autonomy
- Batterer Intervention Programs

Nancy Halverson, corrections unit supervisor for an adult field service unit of the Hennepin County Department of Community Corrections in Minneapolis, called the guide “a valuable tool for officers who conduct investigations and supervise abusers on their caseloads, and for agencies working to become more effective partners in their community’s coordinated response to domestic abuse.” APPA is an affiliate of The Council of State Governments.

In New York, for example, the Office on the Prevention of Domestic Violence, the Division of Probation and Correctional Alternatives, and the New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence have been working together since 1998 to enhance the state’s county probation departments’ response to domestic violence. Through the Probation Domestic Violence Intervention Project, these agencies developed a series of model domestic violence policies and procedures for local departments on addressing intimate partner abuse and are training community corrections officers on the role they can play in supervising domestic abusers and promoting victim safety.

In traditional community corrections practice, the primary focus of a probation officer is on the offender and compliance with a community supervision sentence. New York’s Probation Domestic Violence Intervention Project puts the focus on the victim and her safety. Community corrections officers are trained on how to contact and work with victims in a safe way, refer victims to available services, and use information provided by victims without putting them at risk of further abuse.

For example, when a victim reports to a probation officer that her abuser has been drinking in violation of his supervision requirements, officers are trained to confirm the violation through other means, such as a urinalysis or a visit to the bar where the offender often drinks. That way, probation officers can hold the offender accountable without revealing the victim’s involvement.

In addition, every probation department in the state has designated probation domestic violence liaisons to serve as point people on domestic violence within their respective agencies, to provide information and expertise on domestic violence, and to assist in the development of appropriate policies within their departments.

The project, said Elizabeth Bliss, systems and policy specialist at the New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, enables a more effective, systemic response to domestic violence offenders under community supervision in the state.

“Probation officers have a unique opportunity to intervene in domestic violence cases, but in order to do that, they need specialized skills in not only supervising domestic violence offenders, but also in working with victims,” she said. “Through this initiative, we’ve been able to provide probation officers across the state with the information and knowledge they need to hold abusers accountable while helping victims remain safe.”

In Arizona, there’s a special community corrections unit keeping tabs on domestic violence offenders. Maricopa County Adult Probation has a dedicated unit—the Domestic Violence Program—for supervising domestic abusers on probation in Phoenix. The unit provides enhanced supervision and treatment designed for offenders who engage in intimate partner abuse.

Cases assigned to the unit include those in which the offense involves violence against an intimate partner regardless of the immediate charge. In addition, offenders who are on probation for nondomestic violence crimes but who have a prior history of domestic violence may also be assigned to the unit for supervision.

The program emphasizes offender accountability and requires abusers to participate in a batterer intervention program in addition to other requirements of supervision. The programs provide group counseling and educational programs designed to address the patterns of violent and abusive behavior exerted by domestic violence offenders. In addition, as part of efforts to enhance abuser accountability, offenders may be required to participate in programming by the Maricopa County Domestic Violence Court. This specialized domestic violence court works in conjunction with adult probation’s domestic violence unit, the public defender’s office, the county attorney’s office, and community victim advocates to closely monitor abusers during the period of community supervision, provide offenders with counseling opportunities and enhance the safety of their victims.

Another tool the Phoenix-area unit uses to enhance victim safety is the use of Global Positioning System technologies, or GPS as it’s commonly known, to supervise and monitor offenders out in the community. At least 14 states have passed laws

allowing courts to require an abuser or stalker to wear a GPS tracking device, notifying law enforcement or the victim if the offender violates restraining orders or other court orders, according to the Cynthia L. Bischof Memorial Foundation, which tracks GPS domestic violence bills in the states.

In addition, probation officers in the unit have frequent contact with victims in an effort to provide needed services and referrals to ensure their safety. The unit includes two domestic violence victim advocates who provide direct assistance and support to victims throughout the offender's supervision period.

Efforts to address domestic violence in community corrections aren't exclusive to probation services like the special unit in Arizona. Parole programs increasingly are actively addressing domestic violence among parolees, their partners and families upon their re-entry to the community.

In New York, for example, the state Department of Corrections is identifying offenders with domestic violence histories before their release to communities and is providing training to all parole staff statewide on the dynamics of and effective responses to domestic abuse. That action comes in response to a state law passed in 2008 requiring orders of protection against offenders on parole supervision be transmitted to the state division of parole.

And in Washington, victims of intimate partner violence are offered a variety of services prior to their abusers' release from prison. Through community victim liaisons, the state Department of Corrections is working directly with domestic violence

victims to better meet their safety needs before and after a prisoner's return to the community.

During victim "wraparound" consultations, the community victim liaison, law enforcement officers, parole agents, domestic violence victim advocates and others meet with victims to conduct safety planning, explain the role of parole in supervising the offender, and identify specific concerns that should be addressed in the offender's re-entry plan to enhance the victim's safety. The meetings also attempt to provide individualized services to the victim, offering a customized plan to ensure her safety and the safety of other family members once the offender is released using resources available through community-based victim service organizations as well as the criminal justice system.

"The barriers to effective prisoner re-entry are well-known to corrections professionals; employment, housing, substance abuse, and education are all critical issues," said Steve Eckstrom, victims services program manager for the Washington Department of Corrections.

"Of equal importance to successful prisoner re-entry, though, is ensuring the safety and security of an offender's family upon his or her return. Domestic abuse must be addressed as a part of broader re-entry services. The failure to do so can have dangerous—even deadly—consequences."



—Carrie Abner is a research associate with The American Probation and Parole Association.

THANKS

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