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IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE GREENBOOK:  
LESSONS LEARNED IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY

By the Santa Clara County  
Greenbook Executive Committee

A publication entitled *Effective Intervention in Domestic Violence & Child Maltreatment Cases: Guidelines for Policy and Practice* also known as the Greenbook (1) is having a significant impact on communities throughout the United States. The Greenbook is the first comprehensive effort to detail recommended policies and procedures for addressing cases in which child maltreatment and domestic violence overlap and also to include policy and practice recommendations for the juvenile dependency court where the most serious of these cases often are heard. Released in June of 1999, the Greenbook marked the completion of over a decade of work by the Family Violence Department of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) (2). Authored by representatives from domestic violence advocacy organizations, child protection and child welfare agencies, juvenile court judges, representatives from Health and Human Services, lawyers and others, the Greenbook has been in demand across the United States. Many communities want to address the issues raised in the Greenbook and they are requesting assistance. Already more than 14,000 copies have been distributed and an additional 2,500 have been ordered. Additionally, the NCJFCJ has responded to over 3,500 requests for technical assistance regarding the Greenbook.

Much of the excitement relating to the Greenbook comes from the implementation grants offered by the federal government to six jurisdictions in order to put into practice the policies and procedures contained in the book. More than 90 jurisdictions applied for these grants and in November 2000, six sites were selected. (3) Additionally, the NCJFCJ hosted a Greenbook Summit in September 2000, which was filled to capacity and had to turn away hundreds of would-be attendees. Interest is running high across the United States.

We are writing this article to speak to jurisdictions who are implementing Greenbook recommendations or who are considering doing so. We have been involved in planning and implementation for over two years in Santa Clara County and believe we have learned some lessons from our efforts. Perhaps they will be helpful to other jurisdictions as they consider implementation.

#### I. The work is challenging

Our first lesson learned is that this work is very difficult, both substantively and emotionally. Santa Clara County is no different from many other jurisdictions in the United States. The three partners described in the Greenbook enterprise --- domestic violence advocacy organizations, the child protection agency and the juvenile court --- did not all have good working relationships with each other. Domestic violence advocacy organizations did not trust the child protection agency believing that it often revictimized victims of domestic violence by removing their children. The child protection agency mistrusted domestic violence advocates believing that they cared only for the victims of domestic violence and not for the children who

were in their care. The domestic violence advocacy organizations knew very little about the juvenile court and what they knew frightened them. They knew that the juvenile court removed children from their client's care and, on occasion, terminated parental rights. Juvenile court professionals knew little about the domestic violence advocacy organizations and little about the dynamics of domestic violence. Some judicial officers and attorneys feared that by focusing attention on the victim of domestic violence, the court might sacrifice child safety.

So when the supervising judge asked the Director of the Family and Children's service agency and the leaders of the five domestic violence advocacy agency to read the Greenbook and see whether they would be willing to come together to discuss implementation of the policy and procedure recommendations, there was both skepticism and fear particularly from the domestic violence advocacy leadership. These were truly uncharted waters. Nevertheless, because of a good history of working together on other issues of common concern through the Santa Clara County Domestic Violence Council (established in 1992), all three sectors came to the table.

## II. Build relationships and trust

The second lesson learned is to start the process by building relationships and trust. We accomplished this by spending the first few months educating each other about our respective systems. Domestic violence agencies asked the other two sectors to visit battered women's shelters and batterer intervention groups and to see movies which they selected (*Sleeping with the Enemy*, *Burning Bed...*) and which they paid for with coupons to video stores. The Department of Family and Children's Services invited the other sectors to go on drive-alongs with Emergency Response (child protection) workers and with social workers in the field. The Juvenile Court gave copies of *Somebody Else's Children* by John Hubner and Jill Wolfson (4) to everyone in the other sectors and invited them to spend a day watching cases in the courtroom.

Additionally, each sector provided training for the other two sectors at the quarterly one or two-day off-site meetings. These trainings focused on what each sector wanted the other sectors to learn about. The domestic violence agencies made presentations regarding the challenges faced by domestic violence advocates in the office, in the battered women's shelters, and in court. They emphasized the danger of the work and the paucity of resources available to the domestic violence advocacy agencies for their employees and for their clients.

The child protection/social service sector made presentations focusing upon the different ways in which social services are provided to victims of violence both adults and children. They explained the statutory guidelines under which they worked, the resources available to them and their efforts to resolve cases without having to remove children from the home. They emphasized the diversity of the community and the challenges in providing culturally appropriate services to diverse populations, including language barriers.

Representatives from the juvenile dependency court explained how the court system works according to California law and the Adoption and Safe Families Act (5) from the initial hearing to the end of a case when either a child is returned to a parent and the case is dismissed or the child has a permanent plan such as termination of parental rights and adoption, legal guardianship or long term care in a foster or relative home. The dependency court sector also

introduced the large number of lawyers who often participate in a dependency case, the issues which the court has to consider at each hearing and the timelines which the federal and state law have set for the history of these cases.

Another aspect of building trust has to do with creating an atmosphere so that all participants feel welcome, that they feel valued and that each believes that they will be heard by all of the others. Working with the judiciary presents some challenges. Many in the child protection and domestic violence advocacy sectors felt intimidated by being in the presence of a judge and other judicial officers. For a time they were unwilling to speak fully and openly about the issues that concerned them. We found that by including each sector from the beginning and by establishing a partnership, we were able to address these challenges. By creating opportunities for each sector to present to the other two, we ensured that everyone would be heard.

The three sectors agreed that each would participate in a planning process before there would be any attempt to implement the recommendations. This assurance of a preparation period provided each group with the “comfort” that they could approach the project cautiously. This was wise, as there was a lot of learning to be done. The domestic violence advocates found that the juvenile court was more frightening than they had previously thought. Several left the court in tears at the heart-wrenching cases they observed. The court professionals found they had a great deal to learn from the domestic violence advocates. Some admitted they had been unaware of the dynamics of domestic violence and the cross training changed both their beliefs and their behaviors.

### III. Be inclusive

The third lesson we learned is that our Greenbook project gets stronger the more inclusive we are. It was very important to include the entire juvenile dependency court - all the judicial officers (three), all the attorneys (four separate offices and several private attorneys), the Child Advocate Office (CASA), and Superior Court administration. It was critical that the leadership in all five domestic violence advocacy organizations agreed to participate just as it was critical that the Department of Family and Children’s Services had several representatives from various parts of the agency participate.

But the inclusiveness did not end there. At our first meeting, we realized that law enforcement was a necessary partner. We took immediate steps to invite them to join and now law enforcement has a leadership role on the Executive Committee and as co-chairs on one of our six projects. Additionally, we have included numerous service providers (mental health, probation, substance abuse, public health), foundations (several have had representatives at our meetings), political leaders, and representatives from other organizations (Domestic Violence Council, Child Abuse Council, Violence Prevention Initiative). We have included persons who have been the victims of domestic violence and whose children were under the supervision of the juvenile court (closed cases). We continue to ask ourselves: who else should be working with us.

### IV. It takes time

Do not rush the process. At the outset no one was willing to move forward on any of the recommendations in the Greenbook. Indeed, had the group decided to start working on some projects immediately, some sectors may not have been ready. There would very likely have been dissension and failure. Implementation takes time, but the time is necessary because much has to happen before a joint effort can begin. By focusing on getting to know one another and each sector's work, we started to develop working relationships and trust.

And the planning time was not static. While we were learning about each other and engaging in a planning process, we were also implementing each in our own way. Domestic violence advocates became better able to advise their clients about the child welfare system and began to pay more attention to the needs of their client's children. The Department of Family and Children's Service strengthened its Domestic Violence Unit, created a department-based batterer's intervention program and funded two domestic violence advocates who will work out of one of the domestic violence advocacy agencies. In the juvenile court the attorneys for the petitioner (the Department of Family and Children's Services) began to address domestic violence in their petitions with language such as "The father battered the mother in front of the children" instead of "the children were exposed to domestic violence in the family". The legal firm which represents parents hired an attorney with proven expertise in domestic violence and assigned her to cases involving domestic violence as well as having her available to give advice to the other attorneys in the office. The list of serendipitous changes during the planning process is significant and reflects the spontaneous nature of change when people learn about each other's system.

The pace of progress on major goals should not and has not dampened our spirits. We have been able to celebrate small successes such as those mentioned in the previous paragraph. We know that we are not reaching our goals quickly, but we need to take time to acknowledge the real progress that we are making on a daily and weekly basis.

#### V. Be ready for emotional responses

Our fourth lesson learned is to be prepared to have emotional outbursts during meetings and trainings. The issues are difficult and complex. The safety of children and victims of domestic violence are at stake. But just as during the Greenbook writing process when tears were shed as the committee struggled with conflicting and strongly held positions, so did we experience the same emotions in our meetings. Indeed, some say that any group addressing these issues from the perspectives of the three sectors must have emotional exchanges or they are not getting down to the core issues.

#### VI. Reach consensus

We suggest that no implementation plans move forward until all sectors agree on the changes. The project should be a consensus effort reflecting agreement from all sectors. The risks for failure to reach consensus are several: First, any sector not included in the decision-making process may feel left out and may reduce their level of participation. Second, without consensus the project may have one sector drop out or be reluctant to participate in future

planning. That is not to say that one sector cannot make internal changes in response to the book's recommendations, but for a true Greenbook initiative, there should be agreement and sign-off from each sector. In this regard, we purposefully structured the membership of each of our projects so that there is at least one member from each of the three sectors.

## VII. Keep meeting

This is difficult work. The goals are complex involving different agencies, bureaucratic barriers, and the stakes are high: safety for children, safety for victims of domestic violence, legal decisions in the juvenile court including the removal of children from their parents' custody, and fairness for all concerned. Additionally, there are numerous federal agencies working with our project on every aspect of our work. We have found that simply to keep on track we have to meet regularly and talk about what is going on. We have Executive Committee meetings monthly. There are 14 members of the Executive Committee and it is expanding. The Implementation Team meets quarterly for a one-day offsite meeting. There are about 50 members of this team including representatives from all the connected agencies and organizations. The project teams meet monthly. The projects were identified after a year of planning. Each project has one or two chairs and membership, which include persons that are interested in the particular project. Some of these projects have created subcommittees to address specific issues. All the chairs are on the Executive Committee. Additionally, it appears that we will have an Evaluation Committee just to work on the evaluation of each of the projects. Even with these meetings we seem to burn the air with emails every day as new problems arise. We are thankful that the Greenbook staff is keeping track of the meetings.

## VIII. Leadership

Our success has depended upon leadership within all three sectors, the juvenile court, the Department of Family and Children's Services and the domestic violence advocacy agencies. Had the leaders in any one of these been unwilling to participate, we would have no Greenbook project. Had they not been at the table, visible and dedicated to the goals of the project, our progress would have been minimal. The leaders have set the tone for cooperation, commitment and hard work.

## IX. Do not forget diversity

Make certain that your Greenbook project addresses diversity. Throughout the planning process several members of the Executive Committee and the Implementation Team continually reminded everyone else to remember the diverse populations in Santa Clara County that the three sectors are serving. Just as the writers of the Greenbook established a Diversity Committee which oversaw the workproduct of the three sectors, in Santa Clara County we also created a Cultural Competence Committee and then, as a result of the planning process, determined that one of our Greenbook projects would be to ensure that each sector delivered its services in a culturally competent fashion. The Cultural Competence Committee will monitor the activities of all other projects (we have six after the planning process). In this way we will make certain that we do not overlook the unique needs of the diverse cultures we serve.

## X. Integrate evaluation from the start

The federal grant process stresses the importance of evaluation. How will a community know if it has been successful in its implementation efforts if the process is not evaluated? We agree. We contracted with our evaluators early in our planning process and they are an integral part of everything we do. During the planning process we devoted a great deal of time educating the participants about the relationship between evaluation and program planning. While we are anxious to begin working on our first six projects, we are planning with our evaluators so that we understand the readiness of the participants in the process, goals can be identified and any changes can be measured. All of this would have been more complicated and perhaps impossible had we waited and included the evaluators half way through the project. So our final lesson learned is to include evaluation from the start and in every project you undertake.

## XI. Conclusion

We have found that in spite of our different histories and institutional perspectives, much can be done working together to address the recommendations contained in the Greenbook. Victims of violence need not be revictimized by the child welfare system. Children can be protected in the context of protecting their caretakers who also have experienced violence. Child protection workers can protect both the adult victim of violence and the child. Domestic violence advocates can advocate for children's safety as well as the safety of their adult clients. The juvenile court process can be informed about the dynamics of domestic violence and still accomplish its work within the guidelines of the Adoption and Safe Family Act (5). All three sectors can increase their knowledge of the other sectors and can make better, more informed decisions about cases when domestic violence and child maltreatment overlap. The ambitious vision of the Greenbook can be realized.

We encourage you to read the Greenbook and to bring your community together to consider whether changes can be made to improve the ways cases are handled in which child maltreatment and domestic violence overlap. But we caution you that this is not easy work, we do not believe it cannot be done quickly, and we suggest some time be spent getting to know one another and planning together before big changes are attempted. Building a strong foundation including working relationships and trust will increase the likelihood of success in any implementation efforts.

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\*Effective Intervention in Domestic Violence & Child Maltreatment Cases: Guidelines for Policy and Practice, Family Violence Department, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Reno, NV, 1999.

(1) The length and complexity of this title has led the authors and all persons working with this book to refer to it as the Greenbook. It will be referred to as the Greenbook throughout this

article.

(2) The publications that preceded the Greenbook included the following: Family Violence: Improving Court Practice, Family Violence Project, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Reno, NV, 1990; Family Violence: State-of-the-Art Programs, Family Violence Department, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Reno, NV, 1992; Model Code on Domestic and Family Violence, Family Violence Department, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Reno, NV 1994; Emerging Programs for Battered Mothers and Their Children, Family Violence Department, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Reno, NV 1998.

(3) The selected sites were as follows: El Paso County, Colorado, Grafton County, New Hampshire, Lane County Oregon, St. Louis County, Missouri, San Francisco, California, and Santa Clara County, California.

(4) Somebody Else's Children by John Hubner and Jill Wolfson,

(5) Adoption and Safe Families Act, Public Law 105-89 (1997)