

CEDV Community-Based Accountability Concept Report

This is a draft proposal for a pilot program in Fairfax County. This program would develop and maintain a system of community alternatives to address domestic violence (DV) outside of the current police/judicial system responses.

Need: We know through significant anecdotal information and some survey results that a significant number of survivors of DV and persons who cause DV harm would welcome the option of an independent accountability system which would seek to heal injury, hold accountable those who cause harm, prevent further harm, and provide for the potential of a continued relationship. We know that the current public safety system is not equipped to provide these

Some victims/survivors of DV prefer an option support accountability in the person causing them harm, that does not rely upon police or the judicial system. Despite the existence of several DV program providers in Fairfax County who accept voluntary participants, the low percentage of voluntary participants in these programs indicates that these options are not currently effective at serving this need in the community. This is likely due to several factors, including but not limited to: the perception that these programs are inextricably linked to the judicial system, lack of culturally specific options, and difficulty spreading information about these programs to sub-communities within Fairfax County. Research in the communities has shown that community-based programs can be an effective alternative to court-ordered programs, engaging the social systems that are trusted and influential to the person who caused harm and important for survivor/victim safety.

Design: An alternative accountability system would be completely voluntary (by both parties) and outside of any court, public safety, or governmental accountability system. It would rely on family, community groups (faith groups, neighborhoods, and other community groups), and other non-governmental partners, with the assistance of trained personnel operating out of the non-profit sector. Based on the successful RISE (need full name) program in New York, a non-profit organization would provide counselors to an “accountability group,” which could be an extended family, a faith community, a neighborhood, men’s club, or other community group, which would work with the survivor and person who caused harm to bring about attitudinal and practical change. Those causing harm would have goals and target, with the group providing guidance and accountability. Those causing harm would be held to account but in ways other than arrest and incarceration.

Goal: The goal for the pilot would be for a non-profit to conduct community outreach and develop the program outline, and then to locate and develop up to five community-based accountability programs, each from a unique community inside Fairfax County.

Purpose: The goal of a community-based response system is to create and maintain sites where DV accountability programs can be tailored to cultural and/or personal differences, while maintaining the integrity of the principles of DV accountability and survivor/victim self-determination and safety.

Mechanism: A non-profit organization would be identified, via application and vetting, to serve as the main “hub” for the community-based accountability sites.

Roles of the Hub:

- Develop a framework based on best practices for accountability for those who cause harm, which adheres to DV programming principles but is also culturally flexible.
- Recruit community leaders to develop community-based accountability programs, including, but not limited to, places of worship, neighborhood/community centers, and existing community support groups.
- Provide initial education and ongoing consultation to the program providers for educational programming, group and individual support, services for couples and families, and/or peer-based programs.
- Educate leaders/sites on discussing DV and safely recruiting participants.
- Assess appropriateness of participants/educate program providers on assessing appropriateness of participants.
- Maintain guidelines for all providers that meet evidence-based practices and the principles of DV accountability and survivor/victim self-determination and safety.
- Evaluate and maintain a current list of trained community-based accountability program sites.
- Organize regular opportunities for program providers to discuss insights, challenges, and success stories with one another.
- Conduct outreach to victims/survivors by developing opportunities to educate the community about DV and the community-based accountability options available.
- Continue to assess factors contributing to DV, as well as barriers to victims/survivors reporting DV to loved ones or community support systems such as faith leaders.
- Assist with recruitment and training of additional qualified volunteers to support community-based accountability.
- Educate community leaders on how to find or become a trained program provider.
- Maintain a list of DV resources that can be accessed by program providers and community leaders as well as by victims/survivors in the community.

Funding: Pilot funding for the program would be provided via grant through Fairfax County. Organizations interested in functioning as the Hub would apply and use the funds for staff,

training materials, informational and educational materials, evaluation materials, etc. In the future, fundraising and other grant applications would be used for continued funding.

Mechanisms of Support: A number of existing community-based accountability programs have been identified that can be a source of information for the Hub. These include The Collective Healing and Transformation Project CHAT- Restorative Justice Circle, RISE, and Neighborhood and Community Services youth programs.