

Mytrang Nguyen

From: Douglas Kays <Douglas@LSOSM.ORG>
Sent: Wednesday, March 16, 2011 5:30 PM
To: Mytrang Nguyen
Subject: Legal Services of Southern Missouri PQV Recipient # 526051
Attachments: [Untitled].pdf

Mytrang,

We have received the report and carefully reviewed it. We appreciated the professionalism and fairness of the team. We appreciated the dialogue on important and interesting issues. We believe that the visit was very productive and valuable to our organization. The recommendations will be very helpful in our efforts to improve the organization.

It is my understanding from Janet LaBella's transmittal letter that we are supposed to comment only on factual inaccuracies. We only found a few factual inaccuracies. However, I would like to give some feedback on portions of the report that, without further explanation, may leave an inaccurate impression of LSSM.

First, let me point out the factual inaccuracies. On page 13 the report indicates that "Staff cannot open documents in Adobe Acrobat reader". We have access to all Adobe documents through pdfcreator, Adobe reader and Adobe Typewriter. With regard to the use of HotDocs, after a lengthy discussion among all attorneys and paralegals there was a conscious decision not to use HotDocs.

The report also indicates that staff cannot "perform basic Internet searches from their desks". This is also incorrect. Staff could always do Internet searches from their desks. However, there was a permission process before one could get on certain websites which certain staff members did not like, so they probably told the interviewer that they could not do Internet searches from their desks. The process may have been time consuming and frustrating but it is not accurate to state that staff did not have Internet access from their desks. Within a few weeks after the team departed, this security permission process was removed because the security on the servers was improved. Now all staff members have full Internet access from their desks without an approval process.

The team was informed that the program was working on remote access capacity at the time of the visit and was about to complete this project. Within a few weeks of the team's departure remote access capacity became available to staff.

Therefore, Recommendation IV.3.11.2 was accomplished within a few weeks of the visit except the change back to Microsoft Office. That portion of the recommendation will be accomplished on or before March 21, 2011. The switch to the "Thin Client" and from Microsoft Office to OpenOffice was part of a TIG grant. The use of the Thin Client has been a great success and is being used as a model for other LSC grantees. However, the OpenOffice experiment has not been successful, thus causing the return to Microsoft Office.

For these reasons, we would appreciate the removal of this recommendation from the report.

The remainder of my comments do not involve factual inaccuracies. These comments are simply feedback from our perspective.

Recommendation I.4.1.2 indicates that "LSSM should expand its efforts to diversify its caseload in non-family law civil matters." We want to make it clear that all of our family law cases have some element of domestic violence or human trafficking (except Adult Guardianships). We are not a family law mill. Every legal needs assessment has shown that domestic violence is the most pressing need in this predominately rural area. These needs assessments include opinions of judges, attorneys and the client community. Our huge rural area does not have the same legal needs as urban areas.

For example, we have not had the foreclosure problems of the magnitude of Kansas City or St. Louis. Missouri is the top Meth producer of all states. Southern Missouri is where most of Missouri's Meth is produced. In other words, LSSM's service area has the most Meth labs of any other LSC grantee in the nation. (The movie Winter's Bone was filmed in LSSM's service area and is about the rural culture of many of the counties in LSSM's service area.) This epidemic is one of the main causes of domestic violence. Therefore, we have made domestic violence, not family law, our top priority. Additionally, rural programs have a more difficult time obtaining certain types of grants compared to urban programs. We have had great success obtaining domestic violence grants, partly because of our successful representation of domestic violence victims. In contrast, compared to urban programs, we have more difficulty obtaining housing and consumer grants. Therefore, some of our numbers are grant driven.

I have attached a domestic violence fact sheet prepared by our local Community Partnership which shows the community concern about the domestic violence epidemic in our service area. Additionally, Missouri's Attorney General has made domestic violence one of his top priorities. He has issued a report with statutory change recommendations and best practices for law enforcement and courts. The Attorney General specifically requested LSSM's participation in his Task Force fact finding.

LSSM is actively involved in other case types but the above information better explains the family law statistics of the program.

Recommendation II.1.3.1* (Page 6)

On page 5 of the report there is a paragraph about LSSM's online applications. The comments indicated that the team thought the application process was somewhat lengthy and portions of the application were not written in plain language, thus creating the potential for being confusing and daunting for applicants. We would like to point out that our online applications are approaching 25% of our total applications. This would seem to contradict the team's conclusions. Also, the report raises the concern that the accuracy of the information may be in question if the online application is confusing. It is important to emphasize that any online applicant who is being considered for acceptance is called and income and asset information is verified and additional facts are elicited. In other words, a short telephone application is taken for those online applicants who are likely to be accepted for service. Because of my concern for the accuracy of the income and asset information, I have mandated this procedure in all of our intake offices since we started accepting online applications.

Thank you for this opportunity to make comments about the report.

Doug

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Domestic Violence is Community Violence

Fact Sheet

Why Everyone Should Care About Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is often referred to as family violence and is a significant public health issue.

- There were 3,202 reported incidents of domestic violence in Greene County in 2009 to which local law enforcement responded (Missouri Statistical Analysis Center).
- Harmony House - Family Violence Prevention Center in Springfield provided 24,828 safe and secure nights of shelter in 2009, sheltering 333 women and 295 children.
- The domestic violence shelters in Southwest Missouri are at full capacity for the majority of the year and turned away 452 individuals in 2009 due to a lack of beds.
- According to a local substance abuse treatment center that serves women, 90% of those served are mothers, and at least 50% have experienced domestic violence.
- Youth who witness domestic violence are more likely to attempt suicide, abuse drugs and alcohol, run away from home, engage in teenage prostitution, and commit sexual assault crimes and other delinquent behaviors (Ending the Cycle of Violence: Community Responses to Children of Battered Women, 1995).
- Children in homes where parents are abusing alcohol or other drugs are more likely to witness domestic violence and to be victims of physical and sexual abuse (Center On Addiction and the Family).

How Awareness and Education Can Help Reduce Domestic Violence

Increasing awareness of domestic violence as a community problem can help decrease a community's tolerance of this issue. Providing educational programs on what constitutes a healthy relationship to youth and children exposed to domestic violence can help break the cycle of violence and decrease the generational impact of domestic abuse.

Strategies that may increase community awareness of domestic violence include:

- Providing information and simulations to work places, community groups, and schools on the struggles battered women face
- Implementing media messages that capture the link between domestic violence, substance abuse, and child abuse and neglect
- Assuring intervention programs are in place for children exposed to domestic violence and substance abuse based on increasing protective factors.
- Forming community coalitions with a focus on domestic violence that offer service providers opportunities to create and sustain new ways of working together

Efforts Underway at the State Level

Missouri Attorney General, Chris Koster, created a taskforce on domestic violence to perform a comprehensive review of 30 years' of state laws on domestic violence. Several Greene County domestic violence advocates and legal council have been involved with this task force's review. This group assisted with the review of current domestic violence laws in order to identify improvements needed, and prioritize state laws that should be maintained or strengthened to better protect victims and prevent domestic violence.

Your Support Can Help Continue to Strengthen Domestic Violence Services

Local police will continue to respond to domestic violence calls. Domestic violence shelters will continue to house survivors and their children. Victims' advocates will continue to help victims through the legal system and the healing process. Local hospitals will continue to provide sexual assault nurse examinations. School counselors will continue to help young victims process what has happened in their lives. Prevention coalitions will continue to raise community awareness in hopes of breaking the generational cycle of domestic violence. **We ask that you continue to support efforts to reduce domestic violence in Greene County.**

About Community Partnership's Violence Free Families Coalition

Violence Free Families (VFF), a coalition of Community Partnership for well over 15 years, provides prevention services directed at reducing the incidence of domestic violence, dating/interpersonal violence, and child abuse and neglect in Greene County. With a membership of over 32 organizations, agencies, and individuals, this group plans and executes community initiatives to identify community needs and gaps in service and works to ensure the availability and accessibility of a network of interventions that provide safety, healing, treatment, education and support for victims – adults and children - of domestic violence.

VFF members include:

Alternative Opportunities	Isabel's House
Boys and Girls Town of Missouri	Legal Services of Southern Missouri
Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)	Missouri Alliance for Children and Families
Community Alternative Sentencing Program(CASP)	Missouri Probation and Parole
Community Partnership of the Ozarks	Missouri State University
Council of Churches	National Anti-Crime Institute of America (NACIA)
Drury University	One Hope United
Evangel University	Ozark Counseling Center
Greene County Children's Division	Ozark Technical College
Greene County Courthouse – Domestic Unit	Parenting Life Skills Center
Greene County Drug Court	Regional Girls Shelter
Greene County Juvenile Courts	Springfield/Greene County Health Department
Greene County Prosecuting Attorney's Office	Springfield Partners
Greene County Sheriff's Department	Southwest Center for Independent Living
Harmony House	St. John's
Hit No More	The Child Advocacy Center
	The Victim Center