

Collaborating for Family Safety: The *Greenbook* National Demonstration Initiative and Its Results¹

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Over the past three decades, children exposed to domestic violence have moved from being considered “invisible victims” to being the focus of extensive social science research and the target of innovative interventions. Class action suits such as the *Nicholson* case have accelerated attention to these children and their families as well as accelerated changes in policy and practice. As this interest was growing nationwide, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ), supported by the David & Lucile Packard Foundation, convened a national working group in the late 1990s to focus on the fragmentation of services provided to families with children where adult domestic violence was occurring. The children in these families may have been direct victims of child abuse and neglect and/or exposed to the violence between adults in their homes. The result was a set of best practice guidelines published in 1999 as *Effective Intervention in Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment: Guidelines for Policy and Practice*. This document has become known as the *Greenbook*, deriving its name from the color of its cover.

Key Recommendations of the *Greenbook*

The *Greenbook* focuses on interventions designed to create safety, enhance well-being, and provide stability for children and families. The *Greenbook's* 67 best practice recommendations focus on three primary systems: (1) child protection services; (2) domestic violence prevention services; and (3) the juvenile and family courts. The aim of the *Greenbook* recommendations is to reduce fragmentation and increase cooperation to improve the safety of all victims in a family – whether adult or child – and hold perpetrators of violence accountable.

The *Greenbook* seeks to identify practice and policy changes necessary both internally and between systems. Three core values that guide the 67 recommendations include:

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1. *Ensure that children remain in the care of their non-offending parents.* To ensure stability and permanency, children should remain in the care of their non-offending parent (or parents), whenever possible. Making adult victims safer and stopping batterers' assaults are two important ways to do this.
2. *Develop a community service system with many points of entry.* To provide safety and stability for families, a community service system with many points of entry should be created. This service system should be characterized by the provision of services in appropriate settings as soon as problems are identified; service providers trained to respond meaningfully and respectfully; services designed to minimize the need for victims to respond to multiple and changing service providers; and adequate resources to allow service providers to meet family needs and avoid out-of-home placements.
3. *Provide a differential response.* Community leaders should design interventions and responses that are appropriate to the diverse range of families experiencing domestic violence and child maltreatment or exposure. Families with less serious cases of child maltreatment or exposure and domestic violence should be able to gain access to help without the initiation of a child protection investigation or the substantiation of a finding of maltreatment. Because domestic violence encompasses a wide range of behaviors, families require a range of interventions, some of them voluntary and some mandated.

The *Greenbook* is divided into five chapters, two of which focus on general principles and recommendations and three others that focus on individual child protection, domestic violence prevention and court systems. The entire *Greenbook* is available online at <http://www.thegreenbook.info>.

The *Greenbook* Initiative

The *Greenbook* was the subject of a multi-pronged effort by several federal agencies starting in the Fall of 2000. The federal agencies supported five-year demonstration projects in six communities located in five states. The projects focused on collaboration, identification of co-occurring issues, information sharing, batterer accountability, improved access to services, and improved advocacy. The demonstrations were supported by eight federal agencies and offices. Contributing to the initiative from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) were the Children's Bureau and the Family Violence Program in the Administration for Children and Families, the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. From the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), contributors to the initiative included the Office on

Violence Against Women, the Office for Victims of Crime, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. These federal agencies provided funding to support the six demonstration sites, a national technical assistance effort directed by the Family Violence Prevention Fund, the American Public Human Services Association and the NCJFCJ, and a cross-site evaluation.

Results of the National Cross-Site Evaluation of the *Greenbook* Demonstrations

The national cross-site evaluation examined the process and effects of implementing the *Greenbook* recommendations on collaboration, systems change, and practice within and across the three primary systems. This effort was led by the national evaluation team, with extensive input and assistance from local research partners, project directors, and others at the sites as well as the Federal partners. The team was led by Caliber and Associates (now part of ICF International) and its partners, the National Center for State Courts and the Education Development Center. The national evaluation team collected data through site visit interviews with project directors, local research partners, and key collaborative stakeholders; stakeholder surveys; direct service worker surveys for each of the three primary systems; and child welfare case file reviews.

The results of this evaluation are available in multiple reports, including a final report published in February 2008 and available online [http://www.thegreenbook.info/documents/FinalReport_Combined.pdf] as well as in a special issue of the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* that was published in July, 2008. The results discussed below are drawn from these published sources and focus on both collaboration between agencies as well as changes within each type of agency across demonstration sites.

Collaboration Between Agencies

The demonstration sites established and organized collaborative groups in accordance with the *Greenbook* foundational principles and recommendations, including representation from multiple levels within the primary partner systems and other organizations, as well as the community. The sites struggled with how to engage consumers of the primary systems, however, and devoted a great deal of time to understanding and addressing organizational differences between the partners. Other salient collaborative influences included leadership, resources, trust, and commitment. The stakeholders noted that the collaborative relationships required a great deal of work, but were ultimately one of the main successes of the Initiative. Other successes included the policy and practice changes planned within the partner agencies themselves.²

² For a more detailed report of these findings on inter-agency collaboration, see D. Banks, N. Dutch, & K. Wang, *Collaborative Efforts to Improve System Response to Families Who Are*

Child Welfare Agencies

Child welfare caseworker surveys showed changes in several areas of agency policy and practice, including regular domestic violence training, written guidelines for reporting domestic violence, and working closely and sharing resources with local domestic violence service providers. Case file reviews showed increases in the level of active screening for domestic violence, although this increase peaked at the midpoint of the Initiative. Case files also showed evidence of significantly more cases with documented referrals for adult victims of domestic violence and perpetrators. These findings, coupled with on-site interview data, point to the importance of coordinating system change activities in child welfare agencies with a number of other collaborative activities. Strong collaboration and ongoing reinforcement and training are critical for effective implementation and sustainability of any system change activity.³

Domestic Violence Service Programs

Findings suggest that domestic violence service programs participated in leadership roles, cross-system collaborations, and cross-system trainings throughout the initiative. Within-agency practice changes were less apparent. Domestic violence services stakeholders were very much “at the table” in terms of leadership roles and were active in directing the implementation of the *Greenbook* recommendations. The quality of their voice at the table, however, was an issue that clearly rose across sites. Many domestic violence program stakeholders reported feeling that because of limited resources, philosophical differences regarding consensus versus hierarchy, and systemic differences related to being the one system outside the authority of the state, their voice was less powerful than the voices of others, particularly with regard to the courts. One of the clearest indications of cross-systems activity in the *Greenbook* sites from the domestic violence service program data is the high degree of cross-training, and what appeared to be initiative-wide adoption of screening instruments for domestic violence in child welfare agencies and also, to some degree, in the courts.

Although domestic violence programs clearly participated fully in collaborative activities, minimal practice innovations inside these programs were observed within the context of the national evaluation. Domestic violence services

Experiencing Child Maltreatment and Domestic Violence, 23 J. Interpersonal Viol. 876-902 (2008).

³ For a detailed description of child welfare agency changes found in the *Greenbook* demonstration sites, see D. Banks, J. Landsverk, & K. Wang, K., *Changing Policy and Practice in the Child Welfare System Through Collaborative Efforts to Identify and Respond Effectively to Family Violence*, 23 J. Interpersonal Viol. 903-932 (2008).

personnel did not report much change in their organizations' responsiveness to the needs of families where both adult domestic violence and child maltreatment or exposure to violence was occurring. They did report positive appraisals of the child-friendliness of their environments and of their staffing capacity with regard to trained, full-time child advocates. Overall, however, domestic violence program participants were neutral in their assessments of the ways in which they developed policies and informed mothers of policies related to child maltreatment, as well as in terms of assisting mothers with reporting child maltreatment to the child welfare system.⁴

Courts

Courts were the third focal system in the *Greenbook* demonstration sites. Findings indicate that perceptions of judicial leadership varied considerably by site. Cross-training appeared to increase over time, particularly with court staff. Collaborative efforts emerged across the *Greenbook* Initiative with regard to the courts, and some innovative practices appeared within *Greenbook* sites, such as separate case plans for perpetrators and victims of violence in families, reducing the likelihood of controversial failure to protect charges.

Findings from the evaluation suggest that many of the judges involved were able to manage the difficult task of maintaining judicial authority and becoming members of community-wide collaborative efforts. Judges appeared to have a more positive view of the equality of voices across collaborating partnerships than did other members, in particular those stakeholders from domestic violence organizations. Given that the judicial role is to use, rather than question, authority, and that grassroots domestic violence agencies largely emerged from a system of questioning authority, these disparate views are not surprising. One of the ways to raise awareness of both collaboration issues and issues for families where both adult domestic violence and child maltreatment or exposure to violence was occurring is training, and engaging courts in cross-training on the issues of domestic violence and child maltreatment. Across stakeholders and direct-service workers in the courts, results indicated that cross-training did occur. As one judge reported, it raised a level of awareness and sensitivity not only about the issues families face but also the struggles faced by child welfare and domestic violence agencies in providing support, safety, and resources to victimized families, who are often faced with multiple significant threats to their safety and well-being with limited capacity to protect themselves.

⁴ For a full description of these findings about domestic violence service programs in the *Greenbook* sites see N.M. Malik, K. Ward, & C. Janczewski, *Coordinated Community Response to Family Violence: The Role of Domestic Violence Service Organizations*, 23 J. Interpersonal Viol. 933-955 (2008).

An additional issue explored was cross-court collaboration, and in general, little collaboration was observed. Across jurisdictions, family, civil, and criminal courts are likely to be in separate places with distinct and at times opposing case outcomes, even within the same families. It is unlikely that cases across courts are tracked by the same name or case number, creating significant difficulties with regard to cross-referencing cases. As one stakeholder explained, “With domestic violence and protective orders, there are...different restraining orders, criminal and civil (and) one can totally go against the other. Some address children and some don’t. It’s extremely confusing. There is no single mechanism for all of these systems to talk.”

The national evaluation also focused on how well courts improved their own practices in relation to the *Greenbook* recommendations. Recognizing the need for different safety plans, sharing information and resources with child welfare and domestic violence to help effectively carry out those safety plans, and working with advocates for battered women were all explored across the *Greenbook* sites. Findings suggested that changes specifically geared toward protecting the safety of the child through interventions with and support for battered mothers took place mostly in only one of the demonstration sites. This site appeared to be most likely to have judges communicate with both child welfare and domestic violence organizations on individual cases, and it was the only site that developed a position for advocates in court, though other sites had advocates within child welfare agencies.⁵

Conclusion

Class action suits such as the Nicholson case in New York City have revealed the need for changes in child welfare agency policies and practices when domestic violence is involved. The *Greenbook* Initiative sought to change not only the child welfare response but that of multiple systems in order to improve the safety, stability and well-being of both mothers who were being battered and their children who were also being abused and/or exposed to the abuse of their mothers. The demonstration sites engaged in widespread collaboration, increased their cross-training, improved their screening procedures and made varying degrees of other internal changes to their policies and practices. Many of these changes continue at these sites and at other sites that did not receive federal funding but undertook similar changes with other sources of support. The sustainability of inter-agency and intra-agency changes without ongoing support is a question that remains unanswered.

⁵ For more detailed descriptions of the changes found across courts within the demonstration sites see N.M. Malik, J. Silverman, K. Ward, & C. Janczewski, *Domestic Violence and Dependency Courts: The Greenbook Demonstration Experience*, 23 *J. Interpersonal Viol.* 956-980 (2008).