

An Interview with...

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Q: What is the NYC Domestic Violence Response Team (DVRT) program?

A: The first New York City Domestic Violence Response Team (DVRT) program was launched by the Mayor's Office in 2004 and the Staten Island DVRT program launched in 2012. DVRT works with victims of intimate partner violence, elder abuse, and sex trafficking. The DVRT team reviews high-risk domestic violence cases and coordinates a rapid response to ensure the victim's safety and service needs and to connect them with the appropriate services. Through the Staten Island DVRT program, we have partnered with over 35 community based organizations and City agencies, including the NYPD and the District Attorney's Office.

Q: What was the genesis of the Coordinated Approach to Preventing Stalking (CAPS) program?

A: After reviewing the cases and doing risk assessments with clients through the Staten Island DVRT program, we found that stalking was the number one abusive behavior. 70 percent of victims reported being stalked by their intimate partner, and yet given these high levels of reported stalking, we weren't seeing a correlation with stalking arrests and prosecutions. We discussed

our findings with the NYC Police Department and the Richmond County District Attorney's Office, and since we knew stalking was a high-risk factor for lethality, we agreed to develop a coordinated approach.

Q: What are the elements of the CAPS program?

A: The goal of the initiative is to prevent homicides.

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The first goal is better identification of intimate partner violence cases by law enforcement and the overall community. The second goal is to increase the arrests and prosecutions of stalking perpetrators. Finally, we want to make sure victims

are quickly linked to available comprehensive services depending on their individual needs.

Essentially, CAPS is a training program to help community partners understand intimate partner stalking, including how technology is used to stalk victims. We also train on safety planning, risk assessment, and how law enforcement can work with victims to document and preserve evidence. One of the biggest pieces of the training is learning how to better understand the New York state stalking statute and how to apply it in cases. We created a cheat sheet to transform

what can be a confusing statute into an easily digestible and understandable format to ensure that everyone is on the same page as it relates to the application of the statute.

For example: a police officer may not arrest for stalking because he/she is only hearing about the current incident being reported, and stalking requires a course of conduct. If the victim is asked to identify other incidents, it may become apparent that this is not the first incident experienced. One of the highlights of this program is that it really focuses on grouping together numerous reports for harassment, or other offenses, and recognizing how the pieces, which alone may be noncriminal offenses, can be grouped together to form a course of conduct. Simply talking about our stalking statute in depth is a key element that can change the way law enforcement thinks about the crime. They now have a new understanding of cases that were previously on their radar and have the ability to hold the offender accountable and arrest for stalking.

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Q: What are the topic areas of the training, how many hours, and who conducts the training?

A: The first part of the training is conducted by one of our community partners. An overview of what stalking is and what kind of behaviors the crime encompasses is given. It’s essentially—“Stalking 101”. The NYPD then conducts an in-depth training about how technology is used by stalkers and how to understand the different uses of technology when investigating cases. The final portion of the training is given by myself and the District Attorney’s office where we review hypothetical situations and work through the stalking statute cheat sheet to see how to apply the law, particularly looking at actual cases where stalking wasn’t charged, however stalking behaviors were present.

In addition to training law enforcement, we also hold a training for our community partners that focuses more on advocacy, stalking 101, and safety planning around technology. We also host a briefing for judges with the expectation that more stalking cases will soon be in the courtroom and we want them to be aware of the program.

Q: What has been the response to the program?

A: Support from all partners is key to the success of the program, and we’ve experienced tremendous support from everyone, especially law enforcement and prosecutors. The victim service providers were really excited because they had seen all these stalking cases, and they were supportive of the city taking an in-depth look to collaboratively address stalking. Also, the piece around stalking and technology has been extremely well received.

Q: Was there any resistance or obstacles to implementing the CAPS program?

A: There were not really many obstacles. We already had tremendous support from partners, and we had a lot of the resources we needed already in place. The roll-out of the program was really about training. Fortunately because a lot of the resources were already in place, there was no cost associated with the program.

Q: In the boroughs in which the CAPS program been implemented, what has been the result?

A: During the first year the CAPS program was implemented in Staten Island, there has been a 233 percent increase in misdemeanor stalking offenses identified by NYPD officers. Based on the success in Staten Island, we

expanded the program to 4 precincts in Queens in collaboration with the NYPD and the Queens District Attorney's Office. There was a 400 percent increase of identified stalking offenses in Queens in only four months, and within the first two weeks of the program rollout there, the NYPD obtained the first felony stalking arrest in 2015.

best service, as well as taking steps to enhance victim safety. The capacity for this program was already in place due to a strong collaborative environment and already existing coordinated community approaches to domestic violence, so it was about adding training and establishing formal collaboration around this important issue.

Q: What lessons have you learned?

A: First of all, we really want to go back to the precincts in which we've already launched to retrain officers so that this remains at the forefront and to make sure that everyone has had the training. We've also received a fair amount of technical assistance requests from officers around navigating the stalking statute, and at what point can an incident be bumped up to a felony offense. This will be a big part of their training.

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Q: What are the necessary elements for another jurisdiction to replicate the initiative?

A: Full cooperation from all the key stakeholders and an understanding that stalking is a lethality factor that needs to be addressed to prevent intimate partner homicide. Prevention needs to be collaborative. The training component is also really necessary so that everyone can identify and address stalking cases.

Q: What data are you collecting, and how are you using the data? Are you measuring victim satisfaction?

A: We're collecting police offense data which includes arrests by precinct, as well as stalking prosecutions from the District Attorney's Office.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to share?

A: From a personal level, as a former prosecutor, the ability to continue to work on these issues and implement an innovative tool to hold offenders accountable has been really exciting. Our partners found it really frustrating when offenders were not held accountable for ongoing acts. The ability to now understand how to use these tools to enhance the criminal justice response to stalking offenders has been really encouraging.

Q: What specific elements/ capacities were necessary for implementing the initiative?

A: Having the full cooperation of the NYPD and the District Attorney's Office has been so important to the success of the program, as well as having victim service providers that are well trained in working with stalking victims. Finally, having a coordinated response program has been instrumental in providing clients with the