




2024 ANNUAL CONFERENCE
 Minnesota Family Support & Recovery Council
 in partnership with Minnesota County Attorney's Association



**EMPATHY IN ACTION:
 ENHANCING RESPONSES TO SURVIVORS
 IN CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES**

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Agenda

- Group agreements and support
- Setting the stage – system response to SAVES feedback
- Not being neutral on domestic violence: The IV-D perspective
- Survivor perspectives
- Q&A for Michael Hayes and panelists

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valerie l.
 Child Support Division, SAVES Project Manager

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Melissa Froehle

Child Support Division, Legislative Lead and part of SAVES

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Michael Hayes

Sr. Programs Manager – Division of Program Innovation
Office of Child Support Services

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Group Agreements LVA/CI

- Take care of yourself
- Be curious with yourself and others
- Be present with yourself and others
- Confidential space - Learning can leave, stories stay. No recording.
- Embrace collective expertise – no one person knows everything, but together we know a lot
- Be generous with yourself and others; we cannot be articulate all of the time
- One person, one mic or spotlight
- We are moving at the speed of trust
- There is more than one way of knowing; there is more than one way of being an expert.


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LVA((0 Mentimeter to agree or add anything


Lunderville, Valerie A (She/The, 2024-08-28T21:06:10.646



Care Plan

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Survivor Acknowledgement

- We acknowledge victims/survivors and keep all those impacted by family violence or other forms of abuse at the forefront of our work. We recognize the devastating impact of family violence on individuals, families, and communities, and honor those lost and unseen in this work.
- We recognize that safety is a unique experience for everyone, and that what is safe for one person may not be for another as there is no universal survivor experience even though there are commonalities. We honor the strength and resilience of the children and adults who have and may still be experiencing family violence and understand that being a survivor does not mean the experience is "over" or that it will feel "over."
- While we honor and recognize those who see themselves in this language and those who don't yet use the language of survivor to explain their experience, we understand this is a statement and that tangible actions are needed to address the financial, mental, physical, familial, and social impacts of being a survivor.

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Grant Updates and Learning

- Celebrated year 1 of convening ⁵⁰in July, 2024
- Workplans and pilots in progress
- Planning for and integrating survivor feedback
- Completed Violence-Free member program focus groups
- Acknowledging victim/survivors we serve, and those we work alongside

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F(0 Advisory Council celebrated one year? (not to be confused that grant started Sept 2022) [@Lunderville, Valerie A (She/They) (DCYF)]


Fröhle, Melissa D (DCYF), 2024-08-28T21:38:43.417



Survivor story

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Themes and responses from focus group advocates:

- Abusers manipulate the system to perpetuate the abuse or benefit themselves.
- Survivors hear that things will get turned against them.
- Child support comes up when discussing what type of connection they must maintain with the abuser
- Societal myths and misunderstandings around child support to work through with survivors who are already conflicted about it.
 - A lot of survivors have to get past the "I don't want to be seen as X, I am trying to keep his money, or I don't want him to see his kids."
- Child support can be really inconsistent. Victims/survivors do not know if they can rely on it as a steady income.

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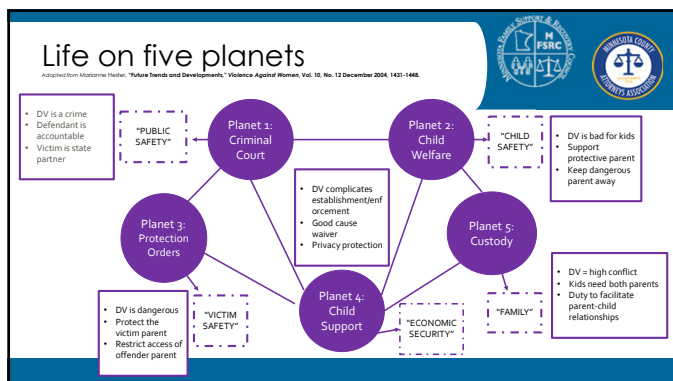
Inconsistencies

- Good cause practices are inconsistent county to county and PA program to program
- No consistent way of identifying or tracking safety concerns
- Some counties consider child support workers mandated reporters, others don't
- Many child support documents don't mention what a participant should do if they have safety concerns

"Can we be less mysterious about the good cause form? Give me solid guidance so I can give them guidance. You have to provide documentation about why you are engaging with child support, and you have to provide proof—one set of proof provided by one person doesn't work for the next. Can you give straight-up guidance?" – from focus groups with DV advocates

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Increase understanding of

- How trauma affects ability to function
- Fear of what will happen with the information disclosed
- Not having "evidence" to prove domestic abuse exists
- Barriers to leaving – and that leaving is often the most dangerous time
- Why survivors return
- Abuse that isn't physical
- Even when the abuse is "over," ongoing effects of abuse can continue
- How our program introduces safety risks we may not be aware of

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Survivor story

Two decades ago, I was married to my abuser. When I finally gathered the strength to leave the marriage, I consulted with an attorney. But when she asked if there was abuse, I said no. I wasn't ready to use that language; I wasn't ready to acknowledge the reality of my situation. Just like many survivors, I wasn't prepared to label my experiences as abuse, even though that's exactly what it was.

Throughout the divorce process, I remember just wanting it to be over, to finally move on with my life. But as anyone who has been through this knows, the experience never truly ends. I agreed to many things during the divorce because I didn't know I had other options. The fear and control that characterized my relationship didn't end when I left; it followed me into the courtroom, into meetings with attorneys, and into every decision I made regarding the well-being of my child.

The system, while designed to support children, can sometimes feel like another battleground where the power dynamics of abuse continue to play out. One of the things I agreed to in the divorce was that he could pay me directly, twice a month, to ease the burden on him. Or so I thought. Remember, 20 years ago, we didn't have things like Venmo or other digital payment methods. Every time we met for him to hand me a check, it felt like a battle all over again.

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FMD(0 How to state this?

Froehle, Melissa D (DCYF), 2024-08-27T16:46:47.876

LVA((0 0 Maybe: Leaving an abusive situation is one of the most dangerous times for a victim/survivor
Our systems may be used as a tool of post-separation abuse (coercive courtroom control)

Lunderville, Valerie A (She/The, 2024-08-28T20:38:49.492



After a few months of this, I applied for child support services. I still remember the worker asking me if I had any safety concerns. And again, I said no. What I've come to realize is that domestic abuse isn't a binary thing. It's not as simple as yes or no, safe or unsafe. I didn't know the right questions to ask, and I wasn't given an explanation of what it could mean if I said yes to that question.


My experience highlights a critical gap in the system—one that fails to fully support survivors of domestic violence because it often doesn't account for the nuanced and ongoing nature of abuse. The decisions I made were influenced by fear and a lack of understanding of my options. This is why it's so important for professionals within the system to recognize these dynamics and provide the guidance that survivors may not know they need.

By sharing my story, I hope to shed light on these issues and encourage continued improvements in how we support survivors of domestic violence, especially within the child support system. We need to ensure that every family is not just legally supported, but also emotionally and physically safe – Carrie Gilbertson

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Responding with empathy: System changes with SAVES




- Creating on-going DV training
- Collaboration with DV partners and survivors
- Update systems and policies so information doesn't have to be repeated
- Making it easier to close a case for safety reasons
- Take more time with a case – it's ok – give survivor permission to take time and not be pressured

"Survivors are in crisis mode and not bringing their best self forward. It might seem like they are missing stuff, not giving information, or turning things in late. They are treading water. Child support workers can provide care and be humanistic. They don't have to agree with everything but give them grace." – from focus groups with DV advocates

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Michael Hayes

Not being neutral on domestic violence: The IV-D perspective

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Survivor Panel

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Resources






- DV Bench Card
- Legal Info vs. Legal Advice from OCSS Essentials
 - [Essentials for Attorneys, Chapter Sixteen: Domestic Violence and Child Support \(hhs.gov\)](#) 16-27 and 16-28

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MN items

- Domestic Violence Workgroup Report
- SAVES Update / Report
- Office hours Oct 21st and 22nd –invite via county message
- https://www.dhssir.cty.dhs.state.mn.us/PRISM/Documentation/SAVE_SGrant/SitePages/Home.aspx

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