



# COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

## The Way Forward

Family Violence & Sexual Assault Resources  
in Forsyth County, North Carolina



*A Community of Solutions*

**Family Services envisions the community working together  
to ensure that all children and families are  
safe, secure and able to reach their full potential.**

Family Services is a multi-program human service agency that has served Forsyth County residents since 1905. Family Services provides behavioral health services, specializing in trauma-focused treatment; early childhood development programs, including Head Start and Early Head Start; and a range of family violence and sexual assault programs, including the Family Services Shelter, a Child Advocacy Center, Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Victim Services, 24-hour Crisis Response Lines, and community education and prevention programs.

Family Services commissioned this Family Violence Community Assessment to provide guidance and direction in efforts to achieve two of its strategic goals:

- 1** To assure families and individuals that experience violence in relationships will have access to a comprehensive, seamless system of services.
- 2** To create a community in which all families and individuals are free from the threat of family violence and sexual assault.

We appreciate the participation of the civic leaders who contributed to this community assessment. We look forward to working together to understand its findings and proceed to implement its recommendations in the interest of creating a safer and healthier Forsyth County.

# Family Violence Community Assessment

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Commissioned by

Family Services, Winston-Salem

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## INTRODUCTION

Family Services is the primary domestic violence victim service provider for Forsyth County, North Carolina. Its current services include a crisis hotline, shelter services, court and hospital advocacy, assistance for clients seeking protective orders, crisis counseling, support groups, and resource referrals. One of its core domestic violence initiatives involves the Safe on Seven Domestic Violence Center, which is located in the Forsyth County Hall of Justice. The Safe on Seven Center offers co-located services for victims of domestic violence, which include law enforcement, victim advocates, and assistance with filing protective orders, also known in North Carolina as 50(b) protective orders, including the recent introduction of electronic protective order filing.

Despite its long and successful history of providing domestic violence victim services in the community, recent changes in the community, state, and nation have posed challenges to the continuation of services as they are offered currently. In particular, funding priorities have changed locally, and some of these services are currently operating at a

financial deficit to the agency. In addition, although the Safe on Seven center was a forerunner in the state and nationally in co-locating services, Safe on Seven has fallen behind more recent trends in providing more comprehensive, coordinated victim services with other agencies. Several counties in North Carolina, including Forsyth County's neighbor, Guilford County, have created or are creating state-of-the-art Family Justice Centers, which are currently considered to be a best practice model in the area of victim services.

Thus, there is an urgent need for leaders in Forsyth County to take action to update victim services in the community to ensure, first, that services are able to be sustained in the current economic and funding climate and, second, that victims of domestic violence, child abuse, and sexual assault in Forsyth County are able to receive the highest quality services and support. This is critical for preventing further abuse, providing adequate support to victims and survivors, and holding offenders accountable.

## PURPOSE OF THE COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

In an effort to better understand the current community context surrounding victim services in Forsyth County, Family Services commissioned a community assessment. The purpose of this community assessment was to learn from community leaders and stakeholders regarding (a) their perceptions of the current strengths and limitations of victim services in Forsyth County, (b) their views on the barriers that prevent Forsyth County from

providing sustainable, high-quality victim services and coordinating efforts among various involved partner agencies, (c) their input on the potential development of a comprehensive Family Justice Center in Forsyth County, and (d) their general views on community-level efforts to raise awareness and prevent and respond to violence and abuse in Forsyth County.



## COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT METHODS

This community assessment involved conducting focus groups and interviews with community leaders and stakeholders. This report summarizes the themes that emerged from the focus groups and interviews and provides recommended action steps for addressing the problems identified above (i.e., that ensuring that funding for victim services can be sustained and that victims in Forsyth County will have access to the highest-quality services).

Family Services identified a list of community leaders and stakeholders to invite to participate in a focus group or interview. The final assessment process included two focus groups (totaling 11 people between the two groups) and 14 individual interviews (totaling 18 people, as two interviews involved additional personnel from the participants' organizations). Thus, a total of 29 people participated in an interview or focus group. These individuals included representatives of various segments of the community, including elected officials, law enforcement, social service agencies, philanthropic organizations, governmental employees, community-based nonprofit organizations, local businesses, and criminal justice system officials.

Participants were informed that the results of the community assessment would be presented in themes, and that their individual statements would not be attributed to them in this report. This was done in an effort to encourage participants to speak openly during the focus groups and interviews. The focus groups were conducted at the Family Services Broad Street location, and the majority of interviews were conducted in-person at the participants' offices. Two individual interviews were conducted over the phone due to scheduling reasons.

Prior to the focus groups and interviews, the evaluator worked with leaders in Family Services to develop an interview guide to address the topics described in the Purpose of the Community Assessment section above. The evaluator took detailed notes during each focus group and interview and typed up these notes as soon as possible after each interview.

Based on the detailed notes from each focus group and interview, the evaluator identified themes in participants' responses, which are summarized below. It should be noted that the interviews and focus groups conducted as part of this community assessment should not be construed as a comprehensive examination of the full extent of domestic violence and other forms of abuse in Forsyth County. Additional data—such as organizational reports, law enforcement records, and interviews with survivors of abuse—should also be considered when determining appropriate actions to take to address these issues at a community level.

The following section summarizes themes from the focus groups and interviews that emerged in four key areas:

- 1 Strengths in the current services and resources for victims and survivors of domestic violence, sexual abuse, child abuse, and elder abuse in Forsyth County;
- 2 Limitations in the current services and resources for victims and survivors of domestic violence, sexual abuse, child abuse, and elder abuse in Forsyth County;
- 3 Perspectives toward a possible comprehensive Family Justice Center model in Forsyth County; and
- 4 Perceptions of the overall level of community awareness about domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and elder abuse in Forsyth County. Following discussion of these themes, recommendations are presented to strengthen the availability and accessibility of high-quality victim services in Forsyth County.

## SUMMARY OF THEMES

Note: Throughout this report, the term “victim” is used to refer to an individual currently experiencing victimization from abuse, whereas the term “survivor” is used to refer to a person who previously experienced abuse but is no longer experiencing that abuse.

### I. Strengths in the Current Services and Resources for Victims and Survivors of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Child Abuse, and Elder Abuse in Forsyth County

Several strengths were identified through the community assessment process, and these strengths offer a strong foundation upon which to build in the future. The strengths that were noted most often by participants in the focus groups and interviews include the following:

**There is a strong history of Forsyth County being a leader in the state in addressing domestic violence.**

Most participants noted that Safe on Seven was the first of its kind (i.e., co-located services for victims of domestic violence) in North Carolina. Several participants noted the visionary leadership of Judge Reingold and former District Attorney Tom Keith, as well as the first Safe on Seven director, Allison Cranford, for establishing Safe on Seven and being a precursor to the establishment of Family Justice Centers in other communities around North Carolina.

**Overall, there appears to be a high level of respect and positive collaboration among community partners involved in addressing domestic violence and other forms of abuse.**

Although some challenges to collaboration were noted, in general the participants described positive collaborative relationships among organizations

working to address domestic violence. Participants working in organizations that responded to domestic violence noted the positive working relationships among law enforcement, victim advocates, and the criminal justice system in serving victims of domestic violence.

**The number of domestic violence homicides has been very low in recent years in Forsyth County.**

There was some conflicting information provided to the evaluator about the timing of the most recent domestic violence homicide in Forsyth County, so determining the rates of domestic violence homicides and other statistics will be addressed in the recommendations section of this report. It may be that the conflicting reports related to different data sources or geographic regions (e.g., the county as compared to the City of Winston-Salem). Nonetheless, the low number of domestic violence homicides in Forsyth County in recent years certainly should be viewed as a success. Participants speculated that the low number may reflect the aggressive prosecution of misdemeanor cases and/or the coordination of resources through Safe on Seven.

## II. Limitations in the Current Services and Resources for Victims and Survivors of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Child Abuse, and Elder Abuse in Forsyth County

In addition to the strengths identified above, participants noted several limitations in the availability and accessibility of resources for victims and survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and elder abuse in Forsyth County, which included the following:

**Although Safe on Seven was a forerunner in the state, it has fallen behind what other communities have been doing, especially in the development of comprehensive Family Justice Centers.**

The National Family Justice Center Alliance ([www.familyjusticecenter.org/affiliated-centers/family-justice-centers-2/](http://www.familyjusticecenter.org/affiliated-centers/family-justice-centers-2/)) classifies two levels of co-located services for victims of domestic violence. The first is the Multi-Agency Model Center, which is described as having “at least three different co-located service providers from different disciplines working together under one roof to provide services for adults and children. Service partners may be onsite either full-time or part-time. Service providers may, or may not, have a centralized intake and information sharing process.” The more comprehensive Family Justice Center model has “a minimum of the following full-time, co-located partners: domestic violence or sexual assault program staff, law enforcement investigators or detectives, a specialized prosecutor or prosecution unit and civil legal services. Many Family Justice Centers have additional onsite partners on either a full or part-time basis. Family Justice Centers also have established a centralized intake and information sharing process that is HIPAA and VAWA compliant with their full-time, co-located partner agencies.” Based on these definitions, Safe on Seven can currently be considered a Multi-Agency Model Center. In contrast, communities around the state, such as Alamance County, Guilford County, and Buncombe County, have established the more comprehensive Family Justice Center model, and other communities

around North Carolina are in the process of developing one. Given that the Family Justice Center model is becoming increasingly recognized as a best practice approach to addressing domestic violence nationally, Safe on Seven’s Multi-Agency Model Center does not reflect the most coordinated approach to victim services that is used currently.

**Changes in organizational leadership appear to have led to some declines in the coordination of services and resources among organizations that work to address domestic violence.**

Although the level of respect and collaboration among organizations was noted as a community strength, several participants noted a decline in opportunities for inter-organizational collaborations in recent years. It was noted that some of the people who served in formal and information leadership roles for addressing domestic violence in the community had transitioned out of their roles (e.g., due to retirement or new job opportunities), and this led to some changes in how organizations are collaborating. In particular, the Domestic Violence Community Council (DVCC) that is organized by Family Services was reported to not have met actively for some time, and it was clear that participants who were familiar with the DVCC viewed its lack of regular meetings as a loss.

**Community awareness varied regarding the resources in the community to help people affected by domestic violence.**

When participants were asked where they would recommend a friend, family member, or colleague that was being abused in an intimate relationship to go for help, the responses varied widely, with some participants indicating that they didn’t know and others providing inconsistent responses. Therefore, it appears that there is a lack of awareness and/or visibility of the resources available in the community. With this

lack of awareness, community members may not know where to turn if they need help.

**Some specific subpopulations face additional and unique barriers to receiving help for violence and abuse.**

While access to resources can be a challenge for any member of the community, interview participants noted specific subpopulations that face added challenges. A few participants noted that the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) community faces barriers, such as a perception that resources are not reflective of their unique needs or that the abuse they experience may not be taken seriously. A larger number of participants described the unique barriers that immigrant populations may face. Some of these unique barriers for immigrant communities included a lack of bilingual staff in community resources that respond to abuse, added stigmas within cultural communities, and a fear of deportation that hinders reporting abuse to authorities. It will be important to give adequate attention to these unique barriers when considering future actions to enhance resources for victims and survivors within Family Services and the broader community.

**There is some fragmentation in coordination and variability in the level of services and resources to address different forms of violence and abuse.**

As noted previously, participants were asked to describe their perspectives regarding four types of interpersonal violence: domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and elder abuse. Although most participants noted that all forms of abuse are under-recognized as problems in the community, two forms of abuse appear to receive the lowest amounts of attention: sexual assault and elder abuse. Among the participants interviewed, it seemed that these two forms of abuse receive the least attention in the community. For elder abuse, in particular, there was not a clear sense among participants of who in the community—beyond Adult Protective Services—is addressing this issue. In addition to the lower visibility of these forms of abuse, it appears that currently in Forsyth County, all four of these types of abuse are being handled somewhat in silos and as separate issues. This lack of coordination among organizations working to address each type of abuse may hinder the availability of resources for families in which multiple forms of abuse have co-occurred.

### **III. Perspectives toward a Possible Comprehensive Family Justice Center Model in Forsyth County**

Interview participants were informed that one idea under consideration is to establish a more comprehensive Family Justice Center Model in Forsyth County. Prior to the interviews, several participants had gone on a tour of the Guilford County Family Justice Center, which was arranged by Family Services. For those participants who had not attended the tour of the Guilford County center, the evaluator provided them with a detailed description of that center as an example of what the Family Justice Center Model may look like. In subsequent discussions about interview participants' perspectives about this model's potential in Forsyth County, the following themes emerged:

**Generally, most interview participants were supportive of a more comprehensive Family Justice Center Model as an expansion of Safe on Seven in Forsyth County.**

The notion of expansion of Safe on Seven's Multi-Agency Center Model into a comprehensive Family Justice Center Model is consistent with the National Family Justice Center Alliance's recommendations for the development of a Family Justice Center. There was a general sense among interview participants that Safe on Seven is known in the community as a resource to address domestic



violence, and thus there is not a need to “start from scratch” with building a totally new center. One issue to consider is that, if the expanded center does address other types of violence more directly (e.g., child abuse, sexual assault, and/or elder abuse), then it will be necessary to consider how to ensure that the community understands that the new version of the center does not only address domestic violence. Overall, the Family Justice Center model was viewed as desirable to the extent that it allows for community resources to serve victims and survivors of abuse more effectively and efficiently.

**Interviewees who were familiar with the Guilford County Family Justice Center viewed it as a useful model, although a similar center in Forsyth County may involve a different combination of partners.**

In addition to the center in Guilford County, several participants noted the value of learning from centers in other communities, including Buncombe County’s Family Justice Center and the Interact Center in Wake County. These participants noted the value of learning from the challenges and successes in other communities while considering a potential similar center in Forsyth County. However, several interview participants noted that they would like to see partners at a similar center in Forsyth County that may not be present in other communities. For example, participants noted the value of involving community organizations to address some of the longer-term needs of victims and survivors of abuse, such as mental health counseling and programs to support their economic and career self-sufficiency, as well as resources to address other common challenges faced among this population, such as housing and transportation.

**The timing of a new planned courthouse in Forsyth County offers a necessary opportunity to reconsider the future of Safe on Seven and a possible expanded Family Justice Center Model.**

During the planning and implementation of this community assessment, the news that a new courthouse is planned for Forsyth County went public. Because the existing courthouse will be moving, Safe on Seven will by necessity be relocated. This presents a unique opportunity to re-envision what the future of Safe on Seven will hold, as well as an opportunity to consider the potential expansion into a more comprehensive Family Justice Center Model. Issues that may warrant consideration as the impact of the new courthouse on Safe on Seven is being determined include whether the center should remain located within the courthouse, whether the center will need to be re-named and/or re-branded if it is no longer located on the seventh floor, and what partners and services should be included in the center when it moves to its new location.

**A small number of interview participants expressed questions as to whether Forsyth County would need a more comprehensive Family Justice Center Model.**

The main concern noted here was whether the creation of this resource would divert funding from other issues that affect a wider segment of the community, such as poverty. Additional participants suggested that a stronger rationale was needed to justify the need for an expanded Family Justice Center Model in this community at this time. They suggested the need for additional data to support whether this expansion is a good idea.

**The source of funding for an expanded Family Justice Center was a primary concern among many interview participants.**

In particular, several participants described the history of Safe on Seven beginning with grant funding, as well as the problems that developed when the grant funding was no longer available. A consensus seemed clear that participants advised against relying on grant funding to support the ongoing operations of a potential Family Justice Center Model in Forsyth County.

**Many stakeholders noted they didn't like the name "Family Justice Center" and suggested giving careful consideration to naming a possible center.**

The term "justice" in particular was noted as potentially undesirable. As an alternative, a few participants suggested the term "Family Resource Center" as more reflective of the type of name they would like to see this type of resource have. Other participants suggested keeping the term, "safe," in the name, and in fact keeping the name "Safe on Seven" warrants consideration because it appears to have name recognition within the community.

**Participants described several key next steps toward further consideration of**

**a possible Family Justice Center Model expansion in Forsyth County.**

These included the following:

- Gathering further data to determine whether this expansion is needed
- Interviewing survivors who have used Safe on Seven to learn what their experiences were
- Organizing a group of partner organizations to explore and potentially plan this further
- Determining sustainable sources of funding
- Learning from other communities who already have Family Justice Center Models in operation

#### **IV. Perceptions of the Overall Level of Community Awareness about Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Child Abuse, and Elder Abuse in Forsyth County**

Finally, participants were asked to share their perspectives on the extent to which community members in Forsyth County are aware of the issues of violence and abuse, as well as how much these issues are a priority. The themes that emerged in these discussions were as follows:

**Currently, there appears to be a low level of awareness of the extent to which these forms of abuse occur in Forsyth County.**

It is important to note that this community assessment did not include a community survey, which would be useful for determining community members' actual perceptions and levels of awareness about violence and abuse. However, among the interview participants, there was a sense that many people in Forsyth County are not aware of these issues and do not view them as a problem in their community. This may result from the low number of high-profile cases that have reached the media in recent years and/or from fewer

community outreach activities that have occurred recently.

**The Domestic Violence Community Council (DVCC) has not been active recently, and its absence has been felt in the community, and particular among partner organizations that work with people who have experienced abuse.**

Interview participants who were familiar with the DVCC expressed that they missed the regular meetings and senses of collaboration that this group offered. They noted that this group previously played key roles in educating the community (e.g., through newspaper op-eds) and advocating for stronger community resources for this population (e.g., for Safe on Seven). In general, participants familiar with the DVCC expressed a hope that the council would be re-established, preferably with a clearer focus and vision.

**There is a stigma surrounding these types of abuse that makes it harder for individuals and businesses to want to step forward to support these issues.**

Many interview participants expressed that these forms of abuse are not considered a high priority for many people unless they have some sort of personal experience with them. This stigma can impact the availability and accessibility of resources for victims and survivors of abuse in several ways, such as by making it less likely that people will financially support these resources, by making it less likely that people experiencing abuse will reach out for help, and by reducing the likelihood that people in various community settings (e.g., religious organizations, schools, and neighborhoods) will recognize when abuse is occurring if they believe that abuse do not occur among their populations.

**Currently, there are few visible “champions” who have the motivation, time, and energy to work to raise awareness about the needs of victims and survivors and to advocate for improved services.**

Several participants noted that Forsyth County used to be rich with champions to address domestic violence, sexual assault, elder abuse, and/or child abuse, but that those former champions are no longer in place, due to job transitions, retirement,

and other reasons. Several participants described the value of this sort of champion and underscored the importance of identifying and supporting champions who have the motivation and energy to work to address these issues in a sustained way.

**Interview participants suggested a need for increased efforts to raise awareness about the various forms of violence and abuse.**

Many of the participants noted the importance of community messaging around these issues and suggested combining different types of information to make the greatest impact. They suggested the value in highlighting the stories of survivors from the local community, as well as pointing to data and statistics to make the case for the extent of these problems in the community. By combining both stories and statistics, participants noted that messaging would appeal to different audiences with both the emotional impact of stories and the data-based evidence that offers a more logical appeal.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING THE AVAILABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF HIGH-QUALITY VICTIM SERVICES IN FORSYTH COUNTY

In light of the themes described above, it is clear that there are opportunities to strengthen the availability and accessibility of resources to address domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and elder abuse in Forsyth County. Based on this community assessment, the evaluator recommends that Family Services and its community partners focus their efforts in the following five areas:

### **1 Work toward establishing a community-wide vision for how to prevent and respond to interpersonal violence in Forsyth County.**

Currently, it appears that there is a lack of a clear, collaborative vision for how various community partners involved in preventing and responding to domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and elder abuse can work together toward ensuring the best-quality resources are available for victims and survivors. In addition, it would be useful to jointly establish a longer-term vision for how community partners can work together over the next five to ten years toward reducing the amount of abuse that occurs within the county. Absent this longer-term vision, several interview participants noted that it was more difficult to make decisions about such issues as whether it makes sense to move toward a more comprehensive Family Justice Center Model.

Working toward developing a shared vision for preventing and responding to violence and abuse should not be done hastily or by any one organization in isolation. Although one organization or community leader may take on greater responsibility for convening the visioning process, it is recommended that key community partners and stakeholders work together in developing this vision to ensure that it addresses issues that are important to wide segments of the community, as well as subpopulations who may face unique barriers to accessing resources, such as immigrants, as noted earlier. As much as possible, it is also important to include the perspectives of survivors in this visioning process.

### **2 Identify and support local champions who will help to raise the visibility of these issues and advocate for enhanced community resources for victims and survivors.**

One of the historical strengths of Forsyth County's response to domestic violence was the work of dedicated champions who worked tirelessly to advocate for community-level changes to create more responsive resources for victims and survivors and ensure that the issue remained at the top of mind for community members. The impact these champions had on the community remains evident today and was described by many of the interview participants during the community assessment.

Today, however, there appears to be an absence of community champions who are doing this important work. Therefore, it is recommended that Family Service and its community partners work to identify and support prospective local champions who will work to carry on the legacy of the prior generation of champions and consider new ways of championing that may not have been available in the past, such as by engaging social media.

To identify prospective champions, Family Services and other community partner organizations can consider carefully future hires for key staff positions, such as the Community Education Coordinator for Family Services. In addition, should the community move toward the establishment of a full Family Justice Center Model, the ideal candidate for the Director position would have the capacity to be a champion in the community, alongside strong

management skills for guiding staff and on- and off-site partners. Individuals already working within Family Services and other partner organizations may have the potential to increase their capacity for community-level advocacy, but they may need to develop skills for this type of advocacy, such as public speaking, written communications, and media advocacy skills.

In identifying prospective champions, an intrinsic passion for community advocacy to address violence and abuse is essential. It is advisable to identify potential champions in multiple sectors so that advocacy efforts can occur at different levels. Thus, potential champions may include elected officials, leaders in community organizations, staff within direct service agencies, community volunteers, and survivors. These champions can potentially work together to engage different sectors of the community to work toward the community-wide vision discussed in Recommendation #1 above.

### **3 Develop a stronger base of both qualitative and quantitative data to describe the full extent of interpersonal violence in Forsyth County.**

Currently, the full extent of the scope of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and elder abuse in Forsyth County appears to be unknown. Likewise, stories of survivors who have overcome past abuse in Forsyth County do not appear to be widely known. Therefore, it is recommended that Family Services and its partners work together to create a more robust set of data to be able to readily describe the rates of these forms of violence in the community.

This type of data is useful for several reasons. First, it will help to demonstrate the extent to which residents of Forsyth County report abuse, which is useful for making decisions regarding the level of services needed. Second, data can be used to educate the community about common experiences of victims and survivors, especially when it involves

qualitative data that share survivors' experiences. Third, current data can provide a baseline for the scope of violence and abuse in the community currently, which is useful for tracking the impact of new service delivery systems (e.g., a potential Family Justice Center model) over time. Fourth, data from different community organizations can help to identify potential gaps in the availability or accessibility of resources, such as if rates of community members reporting to one organization are not in line with rates reported to another organization.

To develop this stronger base of data, it is recommended that Family Services dedicate staff time to organizing data from its own agency records and other community partners (e.g., law enforcement and healthcare settings). As an alternative, it is recommended that Family Services consider identifying a local university researcher (e.g., from Wake Forest University or Winston-Salem State University) with expertise in community-engaged research and interpersonal violence who may be interested in partnering with the community on this data as an extension of their research.

### **4 Re-envision and re-invigorate the Domestic Violence Community Council to provide a regular forum for community partners working to address these forms of violence to be engaged.**

As noted above, the Domestic Violence Community Council (DVCC) has not been active recently, but it was an active and useful group in the past. It is recommended that Family Services renew its commitment to the DVCC as soon as possible to begin to reconvene community partners working to address domestic violence and to provide a forum for additional dialogue about the issues raised in this community assessment. Regular meetings of the DVCC offer an ongoing opportunity for partners who are on the front lines of addressing domestic violence in the community to work together to identify potential community-level gaps in services and resources and develop solutions to address them.



However, at this time, it may be beneficial to re-envision the role of the DVCC. One idea for consideration is to expand the DVCC to include a focus on other forms of violence and abuse in addition to domestic violence. This may prove especially important if the community moves toward an expanded Family Justice Center Model that also addresses other forms of violence to provide opportunities for professionals working to address each issue to begin to work together more collaboratively and to remove silos in the community.

Another idea for consideration in re-envisioning the DVCC is to consider giving this council a more intentional function, beyond regularly convening the group for discussion. A regular forum for meetings and dialogue can be useful, but over time, if a group does not have a clear goal, interest can begin to wane. It may be useful for the group to set a measurable goal to focus on for a designated period of time, and then revise the goal(s) accordingly as they are achieved or need to be revised. Examples of the types of goals that may be useful include raising awareness about domestic violence (and/or other forms of abuse) in the community, educating faith communities about how to respond to members who are in abusive situations, or advocating for an organizational policy change that presents a barrier to victims of abuse.

## **5 If a decision is made to move toward an expanded Family Justice Center Model, be intentional in the planning process to ensure the expanded center's ongoing success.**

Although there was general support for the development of an expanded Family Justice Center Model in Forsyth County among interview participants, more work is needed to determine whether this model makes sense for this community at this time. Much of this work is embedded in the prior four recommendations, in that the broader community vision and expanded data set will

help to support the need for an expanded center, and community champions and a group like the DVCC can provide valuable input into the plans and development of the potential center if it moves forward.

If the community decides to move toward the expansion of Safe on Seven into a more comprehensive Family Justice Center Model, the following recommendations are made for the planning process:

**a** Planning for a Family Justice Center should be a collaborative process that considers the unique needs of all involved partners and involves representatives from partner agencies through all stages of the planning process. It is important to note that a comprehensive Family Justice Center model involves a deeper level of integration of services and resources than mere co-location of services within the same building. This deeper level of collaboration should begin during the planning process to ensure that partnerships will be strong when the center opens.

**b** Careful consideration must be given to how the history of Safe on Seven will impact the community's perception of an expanded Family Justice Center model.

- i. The history of funding challenges that Safe on Seven faced is one consideration, and extra efforts should be made to ensure that sustainable funding sources are secured for an expanded center.
- ii. Second, Safe on Seven's history as a domestic violence-focused agency may be problematic if the expanded center also addresses other forms of violence and abuse. As such, it will be important that adequate information is presented to the community to let them know of the new center's more comprehensive scope of services.
- iii. Third, among community assessment interview participants, there was a sense that Safe on Seven has a generally positive reputation.

However, this reputation also should be evaluated at a broader community level to determine what reactions the “brand” of Safe on Seven evokes from community members. If community members hold a negative reaction toward Safe on Seven, it may be useful to rename the center to rebrand it to the community. On the other hand, if Safe on Seven has positive brand recognition, it may be useful to retain the name for the expanded center, even if it is no longer located on the seventh floor.

**C** On a related note to point b.iii. above, the naming of the expanded center should be done carefully. As noted above, interview participants had varying reactions to the term, “Family Justice Center,” with many participants viewing this term negatively, especially toward the word *justice* in the title. It is recommended that several names, including Family Justice Center, Family Resource Center, and Safe on Seven, along with other potential name options, be considered among all involved partners.

**d** Strong leadership is essential for the success of an expanded Family Justice Center Model. It is recommended that the Director of the center be adept at leadership and being a community

champion, as well as possess strong managerial skills. Ideally, the Director will be selected by a group of partners and not solely within one agency. Because of the time involved in establishing an expanded Family Justice Center Model, it would be beneficial to bring on a Director during the planning process to shepherd that process, rather than waiting to hire the Director until the center is opened.

**e** Another essential step toward the development of an expanded Family Justice Center Model will be securing initial funding for any necessary space renovations and to purchase needed equipment, furniture, technology, and other supplies. In addition, it will be essential to have a long-term plan for sustainable funding for the ongoing operations of the center. As noted earlier, a consensus among interview participants was that ongoing funding should not be based primarily on grant funding to ensure the long-term sustainability of the center. Therefore, it is advised the grant funds (e.g., from the Governor’s Crime Commission) be considered for the more short-term start-up costs, but that longer-term funding for the center should be a part of one or more partners’ ongoing operational budgets.

## SUMMARY

Overall, the community in Forsyth County can be proud of its past efforts to prevent and respond to domestic violence and other forms of abuse. Most notably, the Safe on Seven center was a forerunner in the state, and many other communities across North Carolina are indebted to Forsyth County for leading the way in co-located services. The community also boasts several key community partner organizations who work collaboratively to offer cohesive resources to help victims of domestic violence to achieve safety.

Currently, there is a need for community leaders to re-envision its approach to addressing domestic violence and other forms of abuse. Attention to these issues has waned in recent years, which has contributed to lower levels of awareness of the resources available. In addition, recent cuts to funding for victim services threaten the sustainability of the current level of services and the community's potential to remain a leader in the movement to end interpersonal violence and abuse.

However, opportunities exist currently to re-envision the future of services, resources, and preventive initiatives that address domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and elder abuse in Forsyth County. By necessity, Safe on Seven will be moving to a new location due to the plans to build a new county courthouse. This move in location provides an opportunity to re-think what Safe on Seven will offer, as well as to consider modernizing

the center to reflect the movement to build more comprehensive Family Justice Centers in North Carolina and around the United States. In addition, changes in personnel at Family Services and in other community partner organizations offer an opportunity to identify new champions for building the community's capacity to prevent future abuse, support victims and survivors, and hold offenders accountable.

Based on the themes that emerged in the community assessment, it is recommended that Family Service and its partners focus their efforts in five key areas: (1) establishing a cohesive community vision for addressing domestic violence and other forms of abuse; (2) identifying and supporting a new generation of community champions; (3) building a robust dataset to broaden the community's understanding of the experiences of victims and survivors of abuse; (4) re-envisioning the role and function of the Domestic Violence Community Council; and (5) being intentional in the process of planning a potential new expanded Family Justice Center Model.

By taking these steps, Family Services and its partners can breathe new life into the community's efforts to prevent and respond to family violence in Forsyth County and provide enhanced services and resources to some of the most vulnerable members of the community.

## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

### Christine Murray, Ph.D., LPC, LMFT

Christine Murray is an Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Couple and Family Counseling Track in the University of North Carolina at Guilford County (UNCG) Department of Counseling and Educational Development. She teaches graduate-level courses in family counseling, family violence, sexuality counseling, and counseling research. Dr. Murray received her PhD in Counselor Education, with a specialization in Marriage and Family Counseling, from the University of Florida. She completed her undergraduate degree in Psychology and Sociology at Duke University.

Dr. Murray is a Licensed Professional Counselor and a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in North Carolina. She has worked as a therapist in the adult outpatient department in a community mental health agency, where she worked primarily with adults who experienced chronic mental health disorders. She also has provided counseling in a variety of other settings, including a school for at-risk adolescents, a children's outpatient mental health treatment department, a juvenile delinquency diversion program, and churches. Across all of these settings, she worked frequently with clients impacted by various forms of family violence, including current and past intimate partner violence, childhood physical and sexual abuse, and emotional and verbal abuse.

Dr. Murray's primary research interest relates to bridging the gap between research and practice in the area of domestic violence. In addition, the family violence-related topics she has addressed through her research and scholarship include the following: coping strategies used by women who have been battered, same-sex intimate partner violence, community-based approaches to domestic violence programming, dating violence among college students, applications of family systems theory to family violence, and intimate partner violence prevention research. The full-text of many of her publications can be found through NC DOCKS. Dr. Murray is the lead author of *Responding to Family Violence*, a book on conducting psychotherapy with clients impacted by various forms of family violence, as well as *Sexuality Counseling: Theory, Research, and Practice*, which was published by Sage Publications, and *Overcoming the Stigma of Intimate Partner Abuse*, which was published by Routledge Mental Health.

As an extension of her research, Dr. Murray is heavily involved in community-engaged outreach to strengthen services and resources for victims and survivors of family violence, as well as to promote safe and healthy relationships. She was involved in the planning group for the Guilford County Family Justice Center and continues to serve with the Center on its Executive Committee and as Chair of the Data and Outcomes Committee. She also is the Director of the Guilford County Healthy Relationships Initiative, which is a partnership between UNCG and the Phillips Foundation that aims to promote happy, healthy, and safe relationships in Guilford County, North Carolina. In addition, she is Co-Founder of the See the Triumph, a research-based campaign to end the stigma surrounding intimate partner violence and provide supportive resources for survivors. In recognition of her community-engaged research, Dr. Murray has received the following awards: the 2016 and 2017 nominee for the James E. Holshouser Jr. Award for Excellence in Public Service for the University of North Carolina System, the 2015 Counselor of the Year Award from the Licensed Professional Counselors Association of North Carolina; the 2015 Kitty Cole Human Rights Award from the American Counseling Association, the 2014 Chief's Award from the Greensboro Police Department, and the 2013 Don Dinkmeyer Social Interest Award from the American Counseling Association.

