

The State of Domestic Violence Victim Services in Wisconsin

In the past few years, domestic violence victim programs have seen steady increases in demand for services. These programs have been stretched to the limit as victims have fewer resources for escape, funding streams decline and other social service providers cannot meet victims' complex needs. Stable support for these programs is critical if they are going to continue saving the lives of victims and children in Wisconsin.



Domestic violence victim programs continue to offer lifesaving support to victims and their children, while facing increasing challenges. At a minimum, these programs require stable funding so that survivors can continue to find refuge and safety.

During the last few years of recession and slow economic recovery, domestic violence victim service providers have felt an increased demand for their services. During the last reporting period (Oct. 08– Sept.09), 40,822 women, children and men received lifesaving assistance, and over 135,000 hotline calls were answered.

Yet, these totals do not tell the whole story of the recent strain on services.

- **More victims require emergency shelter and stay in shelter longer.**

In a depressed economy, survivors in shelter are not able to quickly transition to living independently. Even survivors that do not have barriers to employment may have to wait several months or more before they can find a job and financially sustain themselves and their children with out the abuser.

- Last year, requests for shelter surged 109% at Domestic Abuse Intervention Services in Dane County. This was the largest increase in the agency's 33-year history.
- This year, several shelters have already exceeded the number of shelter nights provided in all of 2009.
- The average shelter stay at many programs has dramatically increased. From Dodge County to Rheinland to Beloit the average time survivors spent in shelter approximately doubled in 2009.

- **Survivors present with more complex cases that require more resources.**

As other social service providers reduce services or require longer waits, domestic violence programs are doing more to help survivors create healthy and successful lives.

- Advocacy visits in Marshfield doubled.
- Advocates in Oshkosh spend about 30% more time with clients; this is typical of many other programs.
 - A number of programs report huge increases to time spent on legal issues, some over 100%.

- **Survivors are facing violence that is noticeably more severe and brutal.**

Although not easily quantified, advocates nearly uniformly report a greater level of violence. This may be a result of victims staying with abusers longer for lack of alternatives.

- 2009 was a decade-high mark for domestic violence homicides.

- **Requests for needed services still go unmet.**

Because of a lack of staff and resources, programs cannot provide services to all victims who are in danger.

- On one day in Wisconsin, 273 requests for domestic violence services went unmet.
- In Superior last year, 46 victims couldn't find refuge. 76 Green Bay victims went without shelter. In Waukesha, 550 individuals were turned away. Other programs have started waiting lists or are consistently over capacity.

- **Victims and programs have faced cuts and are at the limit.**

Programs currently operate with bare minimums and cannot absorb more cuts.

- Only one program in Wisconsin compensates staff at rates comparable other social service agencies.
 - Many programs already operate in deficit.
- Declining county funding directly resulted in cuts to services at a number of programs.