



**A Balanced Collaboration:
How Vermont Built a Protocol for Law Enforcement
Response to Children and Domestic Violence**

Jane M. Sadusky

June 2004

Lore Roethke, Editor

The Battered Women's Justice Project
1801 Nicollet Ave S. Suite 102 Minneapolis, MN 55403
technicalassistance@bwjp.org
800-903-0111, prompt 1

This project was supported by Grant No. 1997-WT-VX-K006 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
ARTICULATING THE QUESTIONS.....	4
EXPANDING PARTICIPATION.....	6
“A THREE-DAY PROCESS FOR MAKING POLICY”	7
Day One: Meeting with Advocates for Battered Women and their Children	7
Day Two: Statewide Forum	7
Day Three: First Draft	11
FINAL DRAFT AND IMPLEMENTATION	12
CONCLUSION.....	14

Introduction

Partnership and collaboration. These are easy and required words in a grant application, but hard to accomplish off the page. Partnership and collaboration in name only has characterized many efforts to draft interagency protocols or working agreements and to build coordinated community response. Sometimes, however, it is a genuine process that furthers our understanding of how to work together and strengthen community intervention in domestic violence.

In early 2001, the Vermont Police Academy set out to write a curriculum that would address law enforcement response to children at domestic violence calls. It recruited two agencies familiar to the Academy, the Vermont Network Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault and the Domestic Violence Unit in Vermont Social and Rehabilitative Services¹ to help. Enthusiastic and eager to get underway, the “early meetings were kind of rough.” The partners soon realized that before they could design training they had to figure out what to *say*, and where they could reach agreement about what should happen when children were at the scene.

The process Vermont used illustrates the capacity and challenges of a “balanced collaboration,” as one participant described it. Through the collective efforts of advocates, law enforcement, and child protective services they produced guidelines for thinking about children, police response, and battered mothers. They found much common ground, but also left some issues unresolved, with recognition that their discussions would continue.

This paper examines the process Vermont used, including areas of both agreement and uncertainty, and introduces the protocol to a wider audience of interveners.² It draws on a review of planning notes and other documents and a series of interviews with those who participated in shaping the process and the protocol. It provides a starting point for other communities to explore their own response to children at domestic violence incidents, as well as an approach that can be used to examine other aspects of intervention.

¹ Vermont Social and Rehabilitative Services includes child protective services (CPS).

² The protocol accompanies this paper. See *Vermont’s Model Protocol: Law Enforcement Response to Children at the Scene of a Domestic Violence Incident*.

Articulating the Questions

“When I first started as a law enforcement officer, we basically ignored children. We didn’t want to traumatize them.” After ten years on the job, TJ Anderson questioned whether ignoring children was a sound approach. From her experience, it did not guarantee that children would be less troubled by police response, and in some cases may have compounded their distress by contributing to the arrest of their battered mother. As the Family Violence Training Coordinator with the Vermont Police Academy (Academy), she saw little attention to children in law enforcement response to domestic violence. She saw a need to “create something to formally train officers on responding to children, how to best intervene without traumatizing them.”

To address this need, the Academy set out to design a curriculum, in line with its role in statewide law enforcement training. It would be an elective course within the Academy’s in-service training program. Anderson called on colleagues in the Vermont Network Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (Network) and the Domestic Violence Unit of the Vermont Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS) to participate. The three organizations had past experience working together to present domestic violence-related training to both new and experienced officers.

While the training partners “get along really well, we are collaborative and respectful,” when they sat down together on this project they realized that they did not agree on whether, why, and how law enforcement officers should approach and interact with children at domestic violence calls. They shared a common motivation: “we wanted children to be safe, victims to be safe, offenders to be accountable, and officers to do a good job with the minimum of intrusion.” They did not share a common understanding of how to go about this, however.

As Amy Torchia, Child Advocacy Coordinator with the Network described their initial efforts, “we tried to write a curriculum for training, but kept running into roadblocks; we didn’t have an agreement on *what* to teach.” As key interveners from battered women’s advocacy, law enforcement, and child welfare, if they were not clear about what officers should do, writing a curriculum to guide responding officers seemed irresponsible. Sarah Nash, representing SRS, echoed this observation: “we struggled with philosophical differences and were not sure how to proceed.”

In the midst of this experience of meeting, disagreeing, meeting again, and realizing that they were not accomplishing what they had hoped, Vermont made a connection with the Battered Women’s Justice Project. It led them away from their initial focus on writing a curriculum to a broad statewide effort to step back and address the differences in philosophy and perspective that had been stumping the curriculum design group.

Coincidentally, while Vermont was trying to find its way in developing training, the Battered Women’s Justice Project (BWJP) was exploring law enforcement response

to children. During a training for new grantees, law enforcement trainers had presented conflicting opinions about whether or not to interview children, from “no, never” to “yes, always.” BWJP set out to see what law enforcement trainers were saying and the implications for policy and practice in its technical assistance.

BWJP started with a focus group of key law enforcement trainers and experienced advocates, along with social workers and prosecutors. It intended to do one such group, but the urgency of the issue and the need to incorporate the experiences of women of color into the discussion led to five focus groups. When Amy Torchia from the Vermont Network called in search of policy and training materials about law enforcement response to children, BWJP was available to help design and facilitate a three-day statewide planning session, building off the questions articulated in its series of national discussions. From that point, Vermont shifted its attention to an attempt to answer seven key questions.

1. When an officer answers a domestic violence call (defined as alleged violence against an adult family or household member), how should the officer respond to any child who is or was present in the household at the time of the incident?
2. Should the officer interview the child to determine whether there is probable cause to believe a crime has been? Why or why not? If so, under what circumstances?
3. Are there circumstances in which the officer should not interview the child at the scene, but request that other professionals conduct the interview? Why or why not?
4. If a child has been interviewed by law enforcement in a domestic violence case, should the officer record the interview in some form? Why or why not?
5. Under what circumstances should a police officer report the matter to child protective services?
6. What kinds of policies regarding access to child advocacy services should police agencies adopt?
7. What other things (related to children who witness) should police officers do on the scene or afterwards?

The questions emerged from BWJP’s experience with the national focus groups and the topics that the Vermont partners kept returning to without reaching agreement. They provided the foundation for a statewide forum that drew on the expertise of advocates, law enforcement officers, and child welfare specialists.

Expanding Participation

Curriculum, policies, and protocols are often developed by a few individuals who volunteer or are assigned to the task, which can be a quick and efficient way of getting something on paper. A common scenario is for an organization, whether a police department or prosecutor's office or battered women's shelter, to assign 'Sally or Joe' to produce a document, send the final draft to a few more people for comment, and announce an implementation date. Others may comment or not, depending upon their sense of whether their contributions will make any difference at such a late date, or whether they take the time to read the document. The drafters tend to retain the "expert" role, with the appearance of wider participation on paper. The final product often remains grounded in an administrative level that is removed from the day-to-day experiences of those doing the work in question, whether responding to calls, prosecuting cases, or providing advocacy services.

The Vermont Police Academy could have moved on its own to develop a curriculum for its law enforcement constituents. Instead, it invited the Vermont Network and SRS into the process at the beginning. The individuals involved early on – from the Academy, the Network, and SRS – could have proceeded on their own to develop the curriculum and present it as the product of their partnership. Instead, they acknowledged that they were "too small a group to be determining practice for the state" on such a significant issue. At first they added a couple more SRS staff, child advocates from domestic violence programs, and a school resource officer. This was "not enough," however, and they were not reaching the depth of discussion or resolution that was necessary to move forward.

At this point, in her hunt for examples of existing policies and training materials, Amy Torchia made the connection with Loretta Frederick and the Battered Women's Justice Project. The Vermont partners and BWJP began discussing how they might approach the question and the idea took shape to use a broad-based forum to explore best practice recommendations for law enforcement response to children. BWJP would facilitate the process. As one organizing partner noted, with BWJP's involvement, "there was a sense of relief; maybe there's something we can do other than meet and disagree."

On September 17, 2002, twenty-one practitioners representing key points of intervention for children living with domestic violence gathered to answer the central questions and outline recommendations for law enforcement first responders. Along with the Academy, Network, and SRS, participants represented police agencies, community-based advocates for battered women and their children, a sexual assault crisis team, and a foster parent training partnership.³ The organizing partners suggested individuals who were known for their involvement and thoughtfulness in improving community responses to domestic violence. They "did not start from scratch," as one partner noted. They also sought to involve different regions of the state, both urban and rural areas.

³ See *Vermont's Model Protocol*, page 4, for a list of the participants.

Vermont's work was not limited to a single day, however. The forum came mid-way in a three-day process that involved grounding advocates in the core questions, using the forum to broaden participation, and writing the first draft of recommended practices.

“A Three-Day Process for Making Policy”

Day One: Meeting with Advocates for Battered Women and their Children

In the Vermont process, community-based advocates represented the experiences of battered women and their children. BWJP met with them to prepare for the statewide forum and provide an opportunity for them to reflect on the questions in that context of what women and children had been sharing about their experience. This session included directors from the Vermont Network's sixteen domestic violence and sexual assault programs, plus coalition office staff. About half of the participants in this meeting also attended the forum, scheduled for the following day.

This session was an introduction to the issues and controversies around law enforcement response to children at domestic violence calls. It provided “a chance to think about what kind of policies and procedures would be useful to police, in the context of their own [advocates'] experiences and local circumstances,” observed Loretta Frederick. “You have to start with advocates and inform them, prepare them for going into those kinds of meetings with CPS and police.” It promoted a broad thinking and negotiation process, grounded in the complexities of battered women's lives and awareness of potential negative consequences of various alternatives, instead of seeing one camp or point of view as dominating. “Making bright line rules is unworkable,” noted Frederick, and advocates must be well-versed in the nuances and complexities of the issue in order to best represent the interests of battered women and their children.

Day Two: Statewide Forum

The statewide forum was designed to promote collaborative thinking and negotiation. There was a clear articulation of questions up front, rather than an open-ended definition of topics at the moment. Along with their invitation letter, participants received the seven core questions (see *Articulating the Questions*), in order to come prepared to explore them as completely as possible. The structure of the discussion – specific questions and a focused examination of each – meant that participants had to think about the many nuances and implications of police response. Loretta Frederick, BWJP, facilitated the discussion.

Participants repeatedly cited the significance of the facilitator in what they accomplished together: “She was such a thoroughly skilled and knowledgeable facilitator that it would have been almost impossible for us to simply remain stuck . . . Without the support of

that caliber of expertise, I think that it would be difficult for other communities to emulate this process or for Vermont to be as successful in future efforts.”

Setting the Stage: Understanding Different Roles

To frame the discussion, the day began with participants articulating the different roles of women’s advocates, child advocates, child protective services, and police, with attention to where and how they differ. The role of police in response to children in domestic violence must promote the overall **goal of intervention** – to keep battered women and their children safer and less vulnerable – while serving the **mission of law enforcement**, to investigate crimes and promote and protect public safety. The forum was grounded in this complex and demanding role and recognition that whatever action police take, or do not take, affects the relationships between family members, and can enhance or diminish the well-being of children and their battered parent. As one of the forum organizers noted, “it was not a rigid agenda, but an idea of how to get from here to there. We started by talking about our roles.”

To illustrate and reinforce the complexity of police response, participants worked through the following hypothetical case.

A neighbor calls 911 to report that there was a lot of screaming and yelling going on at the house next door and she thought that someone was getting hurt. One squad responds, and two officers approach the house. A man answers the door and reluctantly lets them in. A woman is lying on the floor in the front living room, holding her stomach and crying. There is a broken glass and spilled milk on the floor. When one officer asks the woman what happened, she says that he slugged her in the stomach. The man says she threw the milk at him first, and she admits to this, but points out that the glass never hit him. She tells the officer that she threw it at him to scare him into letting her go out with the friends to celebrate her best friend’s birthday. He told her she couldn’t go, took her keys and was increasingly angry and threatening with her as the hour-long argument continued. She thought that if she could make him give her the keys, she could just get out of there and he would calm down by the time she got home that night. There are children’s toys in the living room of the house.

Through this scenario, they developed a chronology of police intervention, from the point officers walk through the door to the point they leave, identifying every decision-making juncture, the possible police response, and the positive or negative consequences of that response on keeping battered women and their children safer and less vulnerable. To add to the complexity of the discussion, participants were also asked to take into account the impact of intervention on community residents with different cultural identities and languages.

This exercise set the stage for deeper exploration of the seven key questions. As that discussion proceeded, recalls Frederick, “it felt like we were getting to the heart of what the protocol would look like.”

Exploring the Questions

To guide participants in getting beneath the surface of the key questions, Frederick prepared a series of probing questions that she could refer to in encouraging them to draw out the most complete understanding of possible police responses, and their ramifications.

- 1. Should the officer always seek to determine whether children are/were present?**
 - a. Should the officer always have contact (visual and verbal) with any child present? If so, to what end?
 - i. For the purpose of determining whether the child is or was injured or harmed in some way? Any other kind of welfare check?
 - ii. For the purpose of explaining to the child what the officer's presence means and what the officer is doing in the house?
 - iii. For the purpose of giving the child some messages about domestic violence or about the child's future course of action/safety planning?
 - iv. Should officers have MOUs (memoranda of understanding) with advocacy or other service providers who offer any of the above information or assistance to the child/mother?
 - v. Are there some functions vis-à-vis the child that we do not want officers to perform without the assistance of outside agencies or other kinds of skilled professionals?

- 2. Should the officer use the interview with the child to determine whether there is probable cause to believe a crime has been committed in the household? Why or why not?**
 - a. If yes, under what circumstances should the officer interview the child?
 - i. In every case where the child is mature enough to be interviewed? How does the officer determine whether the child is mature enough?
 - ii. When the officer does not already have probable cause (without the child's statement)?
 - iii. In all cases where an arrest is contemplated (to buttress any subsequent criminal case)?
 - iv. Only where the officer thinks the child has been harmed in some way?
 - v. Only where the crime resulted in substantial injury or the officer considers the suspect to be very dangerous?
 - vi. Does your answer depend on the likely outcome of any criminal case?
 - vii. Any other considerations?
 - b. If the officer interviews the child, what information does the officer need to have about children and child development in order to do a good job and to protect the child's welfare?

- i. How should a department ensure that its officers have this specialized training about children and about interviewing children?
 - ii. What curricula or models exist for such training?

- 3. Are there circumstances in which the officer should not interview the child at the scene, but request that other professionals do so? Why or why not?**
 - a. If yes, when or at what time interval?
 - b. What kind of specialist?
 - c. Is the parent's permission required for such an interview or assessment?
 - d. What kind of report would be created by this professional?
 - e. Is the report used in evidence or for other purposes?

- 4. If a child has been interviewed by law enforcement in a domestic violence case, should the officer record the interview in some form? Why or why not?**
 - a. If yes, under what circumstances?
 - b. Should the record be written on paper by the officer, as with other witness statements?
 - c. Should the child's statement be recorded mechanically? Electronically?
 - d. Does your answer depend upon whether the local prosecutor is likely to call the child as a witness in the trial?

- 5. Under what circumstances should a police officer report the matter to child protective services? (Apart from existing state law or administrative regulations, what do we think good police practice should be?)**
 - a. How should a child's condition or welfare be assessed?
 - b. Should any child who was present (meaning in the home or in the same building as the incident) be assumed to have been endangered enough to warrant an assessment?
 - c. What is "witnessing" for this purpose?

- 6. What kinds of policies regarding provision of and access to child advocacy services should police agencies adopt?**

- 7. What other things (related to children who witness) should police officers do on the scene or afterwards?**

Over the course of the discussion, the participants did not move on unless all of their questions had been asked and there was agreement on where to go from there. "If we didn't agree on the exact actions for officers to take, we agreed on the questions to ask." They did not expect that every question would be resolved via the protocol. Some issues clearly needed more discussion and some were more appropriate to address via subsequent training that would be developed. The protocol, however, would provide guidelines and a framework for this ongoing work.

That Vermont made the progress it did in one day, on such a complex issue with wide-ranging opinions about the best course of action, reflects thoughtful planning, their willingness to tackle the issue, and, particularly, the participants' commitment to arrive prepared, with advance attention to the core questions.

Day Three: First Draft

The day after the forum, a six-member work group met to review the notes and organize them in the format of what became, with some additions, the final protocol.

The path of the forum's discussion is largely reflected in the organization of the final protocol. In answering the core questions they laid out the substance of their recommendations regarding 1) determining whether children are present, 2) welfare checks on children, 3) excited utterances, 4) talking with children about the incident, 4) interviewing witnesses in the presence of children, 6) subduing or arresting someone in the presence of children, 7) separating children from the care giving parent or guardian, 8) resources for children, and 9) reporting to child protection. [*Protocol*, pages 10-14]

Vermont arrived at an agreement on objectives and guiding themes that was the product of their three-day process, beginning with the discussion of roles, the goal of intervention, and the law enforcement mission, and continuing through exploration of the core questions and framing of the initial draft. [*Protocol*, page 10]

Objectives of Protocol:

- To assist law enforcement officers to respond effectively to children at the scene of a domestic assault.
- To outline an effective response which includes:
 - Assessing whether children have been (physically) harmed;
 - Minimizing the impact and repercussions to children who are present;
 - Empowering children as much as possible in the process;
 - Maintaining victim safety; and,
 - Maintaining batterer accountability.

Guiding Themes:

- Law Enforcement Response is never completely neutral and will always impact every member of the family including children;
- Safety for children and adult victims is paramount; and,
- There are many variables which impact/mediate the effects of domestic violence on children.

To address the “many variables” and further refine the protocol, over the eighteen months following the statewide forum, the work group moved through a process of feedback, clarification, and revision to produce final recommendations and develop an implementation plan.

Final Draft and Implementation

As emphasized by one member, the work group “didn’t change any decisions” made by the forum participants. One of its main tasks was to organize the forum’s discussions into key themes, presented in a preface that would frame the protocol and provide consistent reference points throughout. [*Protocol*, page 9]

1. Law Enforcement response to a family is never completely neutral and will always impact every member of the family, including children.
2. Law Enforcement Officers currently experience frustration with the lack of clarity/guidelines about responding to children.
3. Gathering evidence from children can be both valuable to a case and detrimental to an individual child.
4. Children are individuals who experience situations differently. In determining how to respond to children, it is important to carefully consider the impact of any action on the child based on the child’s age and developmental level as well as the severity and danger of the situation.
5. Developing an ideal response requires a working knowledge of child development as well as an understanding of the effects of domestic violence on children.
6. An ideal response should support the children’s connection to the non-offending caretaker.

They also added a set of endnotes and appendices in order to provide additional context and explanation about why the protocol made certain recommendations.

For example, around the issue of whether or not to subdue or arrest someone in the presence of children, the protocol reads “because child/ren may experience a negative impact when witnessing an arrest, whenever possible, officers should avoid a) subduing an aggressive party in the presence of child/ren; and, b) arresting parties in the presence of child/ren.” The protocol goes on to note that assessing safety is a factor in the decision, along with articulating “to all parties present, including children” that officers are responsible for any arrest decision. This guideline is cross-referenced to Endnote #10, which re-emphasizes the reasons for not making an arrest in front of children, while also acknowledging that other interveners encourage arrest because of the message it reinforces, particularly for boys, that domestic violence is a crime.

The work group developed ten endnotes to provide additional clarification of and support for various recommendations in the protocol. [*Protocol*, pages 15-18]

1. Effects of domestic violence on children
2. Variables which impact/mediate the impact of domestic violence on children

3. Why should police check on children?
4. Is there a reason to believe that the children are injured, in danger, or at risk for substantial harm?
5. Why assess child's age and developmental level?
6. Why be concerned about how to announce yourself to children if you look for them?
7. Comforting children
8. Interviews many cause added anxiety and stress for some children.
9. Emotional state of the children
10. Arresting perpetrators in front of children

The work group also added nine appendices: an overview of the overlap of domestic violence and child abuse; background on the process used to develop the protocol; the Vermont law regarding hearsay and children; tips for interviewing children; child abuse laws; guidelines for determining dominant aggressor; contact information for the Vermont Network Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, local advocacy programs, and Vermont Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS) Domestic Violence Unit; and the SRS *Risk of Harm Policy* regarding children and domestic violence. [Protocol, pages 19-35]

They circulated their initial draft to forum participants for comment, which led to writing a preface that positioned the key themes at the front of the protocol and to including the End notes and appendices. Over the next eighteen months, the work group met several times to make revisions and develop additional material.

With an anticipated release date of June 2004, the organizing partners – Vermont Police Academy, the Network, and SRS – developed an implementation plan that includes obtaining letters of endorsement from the key partners, presentation to the police community through various law enforcement associations and statewide meetings, a press conference announcing the protocol, and development of a training curriculum built on the protocol and its recommendations.

Three years later, after the start of this project in the spring of 2001, Vermont returned to its original idea – to train law enforcement officers about responding to children at the scene of domestic violence incidents – after a “genuine collaboration,” as one law enforcement participant described it, to figure out what that response should be, in the context of the overall goal of intervention (keeping battered women and their children safer and less vulnerable) and the mission of law enforcement (to investigate crimes and promote and protect public safety).

When asked, in hindsight, what they would have done differently, one organizing partner said “I wish we would have done this before we spent a year trying to write a curriculum.” Another observed: “maybe it just had to take that long. Maybe we could have realized sooner that we needed the process to involve more people and be more collaborative, but maybe we needed that earlier work and time for such as big discussion.”

Conclusion

Participants in the Vermont process did not reach complete nor necessarily easy agreement on all aspects of police response to children. When asked to identify the areas of greatest disagreement and uncertainty, those interviewed had ready examples: whether and how to interview children or contact child protective services, involving mothers in making decisions about whether to contact and interview children at the scene, and the extent to which officers should search the premises for children. As one law enforcement participant noted, “the areas of real tension were and still are what *do* you do with a kid on the scene?” Another participant summed up the “uneasy compromise” on these questions, and a recognition that the discussion is not finished, but will continue as they develop the training component. “It’s important for people to realize that we kept the protocol pretty basic.”

The following example illustrates the variety of opinion and the protocol response. If police arrive at a call and there is evidence of children in the home, such as toys and clothing in the living room, should police look for children in every room? Some forum participants said “yes, of course.” Others raised concerns about battered women whose partners (or who themselves) may have illegal drugs or contraband on the premises. Police insistence on searching every room could “set off a chain of events that triggers something bad for children and battered women,” as one advocate described it. As an officer noted, “domestics are hard cases for officers, hard emotionally and hard to investigate. Drugs are easier.” The protocol lays out a process for determining whether children are present and whether or not to look for them, and includes a statement that “the purpose of searching the house for child/ren should be to determine their presence and welfare” and officers should consider “asking the victim parent/guardian to go with the officer to locate the children.” [*Protocol*, page 11]

While the protocol lays out common themes and broad guidelines, the application of those guidelines, and the complexity of most decisions made within them, rests with the yet-to-be-developed training, where there will be an opportunity to present multiple scenarios, practice decision-making, and explore the potential harm and benefit in those decisions.

Other issues were identified early on as those Vermont would hold over for exploration via training and additional discussion. In keeping the emphasis on patrol response at the scene, within the statewide forum they tabled discussions of whether officers should contact a child’s school after an incident, service of adult protection orders, and child custody issues.

Vermont’s process in arriving at its protocol improves the likelihood that its next steps in training and implementation will strengthen the overall goal of intervention to keep battered women and their children safer, while providing law enforcement officers with the direction and tools that support their public safety mission. “We want law enforcement to believe that this is a tool for them on how to best handle a bad situation.” The participants interviewed repeatedly came back to the *process*, and its significance in

exploring an issue with the breadth and complexity of law enforcement response to children and domestic violence.

I'm proud of what we came up with and the level of calm discussion. There was little or no turf there that day. – Law enforcement officer

The officers present were really able to give voice to the dilemmas officers around the state face. – An advocate

We wanted them to be vocal, to have opinions, and express opinions. – A forum organizer

None of the law enforcement officers who have looked at it have said, 'What are THEY trying to shove down our throats?' – A forum organizer

We needed to understand what framework police are working in. – An SRS worker

I found it to be extremely productive and the final protocol has many valuable components. – An advocate

Among the tests in presenting the protocol to a wider law enforcement audience will be the need to address the perception among many officers that much is demanded of them, and once again they, and not other interveners, are being asked to change.. This sentiment surfaced to a degree in at least one small group discussion during the forum. “You’re asking us to change, but you’re not willing to,” was how one participant described an officer’s frustration that by policy domestic violence programs would not provide outreach to victims at the scene. At the same time, there is concern among some advocates that “a process that included so much advocate input seems to carry the implication that the final document had advocate support and I’m not sure that this was the case with all aspects of the final protocol.”

The challenge to the Vermont partners is to pursue the areas of disagreement they identified during the protocol process. Many collaborative efforts lose momentum just at the point that they require sustained effort, and one forum participant expressed this concern: “I am not confident that the continuing discussion . . . will ever take place and that, ultimately, the law enforcement community will make the decisions about these most difficult issues in isolation.” Vermont faces the paradox of having accomplished much in their collaboration around the protocol, while thereby increasing the need for ongoing dialogue and problem solving. Fortunately, their process left a reservoir of trust and respect that makes it more likely that their discussions will continue.

Vermont has made a significant contribution to a critical and largely unexamined aspect of community intervention in domestic violence. The protocol provides a starting point for other communities to begin a dialogue and explore their own response to children at domestic violence incidents. The process also suggests an approach to examining other aspects of our efforts to improve the safety and well-being of battered women and their

children, and to hold batterers accountable for their actions. It could be applied to developing guidelines for dominant aggressor considerations, for example, or advocacy response to battered women who use violence.

The process that Vermont used drew out the complexity of the issue via these components: an engaged, thoughtful, and prepared cross-section of key interveners; a skilled facilitator who was well-grounded in the history and variety of domestic violence intervention and its impact on battered women and their children; and, specific questions to guide the discussion. As Loretta Frederick notes: “rather than police or advocates coming to the table with a policy for others to *react to*, the process of responding to the questions draws out the complexity. It’s a good component for developing protocol: by thinking about all different sides in examining the questions we get at the nuances and complexities.”