The Partner to Protect Report:
Identified Challenges and Solutions

On December 9th and 10th, 2011, executive directors from domestic violence programs and high-ranking representatives from law enforcement agencies came together to participate in Partner to Protect: a Leadership Summit for Family Violence and Law Enforcement. At this unprecedented event, participants came together to identify current challenges in keeping domestic violence survivors safe and holding offenders accountable. Significantly, they also discussed solutions. Obviously additional ideas and approaches exist; the Texas Council on Family Violence looks help communities offer and implement their own innovative strategies and solutions.

Domestic Violence Training for Law Enforcement Officers
Challenge: Law enforcement identified this as a major theme at the Summit. Law enforcement officers in Texas seek continued and advanced training necessary to respond effectively to family violence calls. Rural law enforcement particularly highlighted the need for specialized training for their efforts as being distinct from the needs of urban and suburban colleagues. Specifically, they noted limited training dollars and resources as barriers. Currently, the statutory framework for officer training does not include required, specific training on domestic violence. Both executive directors and law enforcement identified this as a continuing area of challenge.

Solutions: SAFVIC Program Manager, Jennifer Gonzalez, spoke of an existing resource to address this challenge. The Sexual Assault Family Violence Instructor Course (SAFVIC) offers law enforcement in depth training on family violence and sexual assault issues. All SAFVIC instructors are law enforcement officers. Trainings are free of charge and count toward continuing education credits. For more information go to: www.safvic.org.

In addition, participants noted the usefulness of the Texas Council on Family Violence’s (TCFV) To Protect & Serve, a best practice training manual for law enforcement. This manual comes in the form of a topic searchable CD-rom and encompasses a wide range of issues law enforcement
officers encounter related to family violence such as: criminal enforcement of protective orders, immigration, full faith and credit, firearms, and evidentiary issues. For free copies of To Protect and Serve contact Policy Manager Tracy Grinstead-Everly at tgrinstead-everly@tcfv.org or call 512-794-1133.

Additionally TCFV hosts nine Criminal Justice System Response Trainings (CJSRTs) annually across the state to help family violence programs, law enforcement, prosecutors, and other criminal justice officials strengthen coordinated community responses. To find out about an upcoming CJSRT in your area, contact Support to Service Providers Director Maria Jose Angelelli at mangelelli@tcfv.org or call 512-794-1133.

**Shaping Media Response to Family Violence**

Challenge: Participants realized and digested the seriousness of maintaining victims’ names as confidential when the media covers incidences of domestic violence. Both law enforcement and executive directors agreed that re-victimization in the media coverage of the event should be a strong consideration in determining how best to interact with the media as it attempts to tell

Solutions: Both law enforcement and family violence programs can make use of the reasonable media interest that often arises after some domestic violence incidents. In this context law enforcement and executive directors can help to educate the public about the obstacles faced by victims, how friends and family can support victims and help keep perpetrators accountable, and what resources are available in the community. When speaking to the media, law enforcement and family violence programs can present a unified message that family violence crimes will not be tolerated in the community. They can also present a path for prevention of domestic violence by helping the media highlight the root reasons allowing for violence to be a possibility. Continued coordination and communication between law enforcement and executive directors well before an incident occurs makes this practicable.

**Initiating a Working Relationship between Domestic Violence Programs and Law Enforcement**

Challenge: Participants explained and commented on the differences in mission between executive directors and law enforcement. These reasonable and often desired differences can contribute to miscommunication or a lack of communication than can go on for years and divide a community’s approach to addressing domestic violence.

Solutions: The executive director of the domestic violence program and the sheriff/chief of police should meet regularly to establish a close working relationship. At initial meetings
executive directors can give law enforcement the direct number to their shelter advocate or 24-hour hotline; executive directors might also provide a direct number for law enforcement to contact the executive director and vice versa. Best practice is for executive directors to foster an environment in which victims referred to shelter by law enforcement will be admitted to the shelter when possible. This can be a tremendous help for law enforcement needing to place victims right after life threatening incidents and strongly encourages collaboration.

Create a Coordinated Community Response by Starting a Domestic Violence Task Force
Challenge: As mentioned above, domestic violence programs and law enforcement both agreed that although communication must occur, practical and continued commitment to continuing communication can become a challenge due to the differing roles of domestic violence programs and law enforcement.

Solutions: The domestic violence program and law enforcement agency in a community can start a Task Force which meets monthly to address ways to enhance the response to family violence. District attorneys, law enforcement, hospital staff, and domestic violence advocates make sense as participants. The Summit participants agreed advertising widely to stakeholders and serving food facilitates participation. For support in starting a domestic violence task force, prevention commission, coordinating council or similar coordinated community response in your area, contact TCFV Policy Manager Tracy Grinstead-Everly at: tracygrinstead-everly@tcfv.org or call 512-794-1133.

Training Judges
Challenge: Both advocate leaders and law enforcement leaders identified the continuing need for making sure that all parts of the coordinated community response receive regular and specialized training regarding domestic violence law and dynamics. They agreed this can be particularly crucial for the judiciary.

Solutions: This year, TCFV will host its second annual Approaching the Bench Summit. The Summit fosters an environment of communication and a coordinated response between judges who handle matters related to family violence in their courtrooms. At the event, TCFV will offer feedback from executive director and law enforcement leadership from Partner to Protect. Executive directors of family violence programs and others can recommend judges to attend this annual Summit, offering suggestions for those within the judiciary that can use additional
information and provide leadership to others in attendance on their courtroom response to domestic violence. To recommend a judge, contact Tracy Grinstead-Everly at: tgrinstead-everly@tcfv.org or call 512-794-1133.

Removal of Firearms
Challenge: Participants saw the serious lethality of and illegality involved with perpetrators of domestic violence who also possess firearms. Realizing that state and federal prohibitions exist regarding domestic violence defendants possessing firearms, law enforcement and executive directors pointed out that defendants nevertheless often continue to possess them. The actual removal of firearms from perpetrators of family violence who have a protective orders against them or who have been convicted of a misdemeanor crime involving family violence represents a key part of reducing family violence fatalities. Participants identified that removal remains a significant practical challenge.

Solutions: Best practice is for law enforcement to develop a stakeholder approved protocol for removal and storage of such weapons. Rather than reinventing the wheel, executive directors and law enforcement leadership can look to other communities’ approaches to removal; obviously fashioning workable protocols may require careful consideration for a specific community’s realities. Federal and state grant opportunities exist to support firearm surrender and removal projects. For more help in starting a stakeholder-driven process for determining how to remove firearms from domestic violence offenders, contact Tracy Grinstead-Everly at: tgrinstead-everly@tcfv.org or call 512-794-1133

Create a Fatality Review Team
Challenge: As mentioned above, law enforcement and executive directors agree that continuing conversation and communication should be key in any coordinated community response. Yet challenges in workload and differences in mission can make true coordination a challenge.

Solution: Domestic Violence Fatality Review Teams provide a regular, focused setting for coordination; DVFRTs promote solutions-focused, systemic change in a given community using the scarring tragedy of a domestic violence-related fatality as a catalyst. Stakeholders come together on a periodic basis to take a look at the factors and realities that led to a murder or death related to domestic violence; they do so in a manner that is confidential and nonjudgmental. Participants might include prosecutors, law enforcement, family violence service providers, personnel, educators and others that touch the lives of victims, offenders and their children prior to the fatality. Currently, Fatality Review Teams exist in El Paso, Houston, Dallas, Austin and
Texarkana. Technical assistance for communities interested in starting a fatality review team is available from TCFV. Contact Policy Director Aaron Setliff at: asetliff@tcfv.org or call 512-794-1133.

**Determining the Predominant Aggressor**

Challenge: Executive directors of domestic violence programs and law enforcement agreed determining the predominant aggressor at the scene of a domestic violence offense ranks as one of the key challenges law enforcement faces. Certainly, without specialized training, the task becomes significantly more difficult. Participants also understood the significant danger of arresting the true victim of domestic violence and the need to look at the broader picture of continuing lethality between the two parties. Weighing these considerations at the scene further complicates the matter.

Solutions: Domestic violence experts including advocates, law enforcement and prosecutors developed *Determining the Predominant Aggressor*, a tool which can help law enforcement officers properly discern which party should be arrested. A similar tool exists for prosecutors to help them determine if a victim has been wrongly arrested. Participants also pointed to the continuing need for the expertise that domestic violence programs can offer new and more tenured officers in understanding the broader picture of domestic violence in performing a predominant aggressor analysis. For a copy of the tools mentioned, contact TCFV Policy Manager Tracy Grinstead-Everly at: tgrinstead-everly@tcfv.org or call 512-794-1133.

**Memorandums of Understanding Between Law Enforcement Agencies and Domestic Violence Programs**

Challenge: In working together in pursuit of a coordinated community response, strictly informal collaboration may not offer enough structure to law enforcement and domestic violence executive directors. For instance, when leadership shifts, relationships may be lost; staff changes and the realities of communicating within large organizations may also slow or stop long-term collaboration.

Solutions: Attendees to the Summit agreed that a Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) between the domestic violence program and the law enforcement agency can help formalize solid working relationships. An MOU can serve to outline and clarify the relationship between the agencies and establish or formalize protocols that help both agencies to better serve and protect victims of domestic violence. For assistance drafting an MOU contact Policy Director Tracy Grinstead-Everly at: tgrinstead-everly@tcfv.org or call 512-794-1133.

For more discussion of the *Partner to Protect Summit*, please see the attached report. Consider offering feedback to TCFV on the Summit and these materials by calling or emailing any of those mentioned above.