

Snapshot of Success: Cook County, Illinois

Standard Intro

“Every two minutes a woman is sexually assaulted somewhere in America”

“More than one million women are stalked each year”

“Nearly one out of three murdered women die at the hands of an intimate partner”

“America is responding”

Snapshot Transcript

Narrator: In 1994, Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act to address the problems of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. This landmark legislation created new federal crimes and provided resources to help states, tribes, and local communities focus on victim safety and defender accountability. These resources have made a real difference. Cook County, Illinois, is transforming domestic violence prosecution by drawing victims into the judicial process.

Richard A. Devine, State’s Attorney of Cook County, Illinois: Our jurisdiction is Cook County, which is comprised of Chicago and the surrounding suburbs. In Cook County, you have about 5.5 million people, and approximately 3 million people live in Chicago. Certainly in domestic violence, we find that the groups involved cut across racial and economic lines.

Maura Slattery, Assistant State’s Attorney, Deputy Supervisor, Domestic Violence Division: It was definitely the awareness and realization of Mr. Devine, the service community, and the advocacy community, that we needed to look at domestic violence cases different. What was it that we could do? All of us as a team, different perspective, different ideas about DV, not necessarily with the same ideology, but with the same goal do to make these victims really become a part of the system, become a part of the process and feel that they were being served and getting the service they needed.

Hon. Gloria Coco, Supervising Judge, Domestic Violence Court: There's a number of assignments that judges can have in the Circuit Court of Cook County, in any jurisdiction where they preside in Cook County. I've had a number of assignments, but this is the one assignment I have found that as a judge, you feel that you really can make a difference in people's lives, you know, and especially in domestic violence. In the misdemeanor division, we know that this is the first step to intra family homicide.

Narrator: The challenge was clear. To truly intervene, victims must be drawn into the justice system, not left to negotiate complex civil and legal proceedings on their own. Prosecutors and

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advocates realized that to change this, it was time to start working together.

Maura Slattery, Assistant State’s Attorney, Deputy Supervisor, Domestic Violence Division: I think if you talk to any prosecutor, any police officer or advocate, one of the biggest hurdles that we all have trying to get that victim to come to court or participate in the criminal justice system as a way of possibly breaking that cycle and getting help, not only for the offender, but for themselves as well. Too often, they don't know that we have advocates here, Victim Witness here, we have a career resource center here. Things that could make their life easier, that they could get counseling for themselves or their children. That they have educational and job opportunities all in one central place. So that this wasn't a place, a cold, uncaring place, but rather there were people here that wanted to help, that were together as a team and that were willing to help, and that was all here.

Gil Broderick, Investigator, Domestic Violence Unit Target Abuser Call Team: TACs stands for Target Abuse Calls. And that is, we take the most serious cases out of all our domestic violence cases, which there's 50,000 of them a year. We wind up with approximately 2000 cases and we put them in the TAC team and the TAC team consists of two prosecutors, we have four investigators, and we work in teams, male, female teams, and we have two people from the advocates, and we have two court advocates.

Driving to domestic call with female officer – speaking: Defendant in custody, placed under arrest on signed complaint after victim stated she was kicked and thrown on the floor after a verbal altercation, defendant placed in custody.

Gil Broderick, Investigator, Domestic Violence Unit Target Abuser Call Team: You know, we have the very first contact with them, so the attorney is all write up an attorney request form and they'll put on there, they might need a subpoena served or they might need a witness located. They might want you to go out and interview somebody or gather up some evidence. So that's what we do. We go out and make that initial first contact with the victim. We come out to check on you, make sure you're all right. Yeah. Great. Everything, you know. When you first get there, they're leery. They're scared of you, they don't know what you want, you know. We let them know, hey, we're here to help you.

Female Officer: You go up to the room, the people are going to come and get you. They're going to take you aside before you go to the judge or anything, and they're going to talk to you about everything they get. And these people will try to assist you so that you can make a good decision about what to do for the future.

Gil Broderick, Investigator, Domestic Violence Unit Target Abuser Call Team: And we explain the program to them. We give them a copy; each person gets a copy. We also have it in Spanish, and we have it in Polish. You know, we do everything we can to get them into court and let them know we're there to help.

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Narrator: TAC team members are dedicated to two common goals, victim safety and offender accountability. Through Vala, the Tac program has established a system of effective relationships that have made these goals attainable.

Deirdra Griffin, Hull House, Victim Advocate, Target Abuser Call Team: I've actually been here about seven years now, and I began as a Hull House advocate. And I remember how the flow of communication between the different members of the court personnel and our office wasn't always very efficient. Now you have where everyone's working together. Everyone is speaking about the same cases and addressing the same complaint, but in different respects. We now make sure that all the issues that we can possibly address are addressed before that complainant leaves us. And it also means that the complainant has access to all of these services up front were before, they may or may not speak to an advocate. They may or may not have the opportunity to link with a civil attorney. The State's Attorney's Office may or may not have been able to spend as much time with them on specific issues because they were trying to address the criminal case. There may be a lot of issues now that we can address, not only before they even come to court, because an investigator has come out to speak to them, but even throughout the process and even after with our follow up.

Narrator: While there is a range of services available for victims, there is also a wide range of options for judges to help them ensure offender accountability.

Hon. Gloria Coco, Supervising Judge, Domestic Violence Court: There's a menu of options for the judge to choose a particular sentence for that defendant, what that Defendant needs. And there's a ray of choices that a judge has to choose in a sentencing order, as I mentioned before, whether it's in a misdemeanor, 364 days in jail, there's a period of supervision, conditional discharge, or probation, in which the Judge can also sentence that defendant to complete domestic violence counseling, which is a very important tool. And domestic violence counseling can be anywhere 16-25 weeks, alcohol and drug evaluation if it's found that a particular individual needs alcohol or drug counseling, then it's a part of that order that they complete a program. Usually, it's outpatient. But if that defendant does not complete it satisfactorily, then also the judge does have the option to sentence that defendant to a period of incarceration, where in the Cook County Department of Corrections, they have an in-house alcohol and drug program. Same for mental health evaluation and counseling, if there's a need for that counseling, one even besides domestic violence counseling, other issues, then that can be a part of the sentence as well as parenting classes because of course, we do get cases where the domestic battery is committed on the child. Also, we have another option called the Sheriff's Work Alternative Program, where that is more or less day labor and it is conducted by the Cook County Sheriff's Department, which can also be an option for a judge in sentencing.

Maura Slattery, Assistant State's Attorney, Deputy Supervisor, Domestic Violence Division: The return rate for victims to court or to go to court cases is 20% in TAC when we first started out. And presently we have a return rate 75-80% so we are reaching more victims. In addition, our

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conviction rate on these cases is 85%. Domestic violence has such a rippling effect throughout all of society. While it might seem to most people, you're only affecting a small number of cases. No, we're not, we're affecting lives, we're affecting numbers of lives, numbers of people, and future generations. So that it's a wise investment, And that only through these federal funds and through these programs that allow us to be innovative, that allow us to really become together as partners, are we really going to be able to make a true difference in the long run.

END

Standard Outro:

This program is dedicated to the survivors and victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking whose courage, strength, and commitment to these issues have inspired and informed us all.

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