

# **ERIE COUNTY FAMILY VIOLENCE PROFILE**



**June, 2007**

*Created by:*

The Erie County Coalition Against Family Violence - Research Committee



# Erie County Coalition Against Family Violence

## Erie County Family Violence Profile

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## Introduction

The Erie County Coalition Against Family Violence (ECCAFV) is a member-driven organization that engages in social change activism to dismantle the root causes of domestic violence at the individual, organizational, and institutional levels. Founded in 1978, the coalition's membership is diverse and includes human service providers, domestic violence advocates, criminal justice personnel, law enforcement officers, government representatives, health care professionals, educators, interested citizens and students who work towards ending domestic violence in the Buffalo and Erie County community.

As part of its recent strategic planning effort, ECCAFV identified a goal of providing education and training to area professionals and the community at large around the issue of domestic violence. To that end, the coalition launched the Education and Training Institute, a year-long series of trainings geared to various audiences. In addition, ECCAFV tasked a small committee with gathering relevant data on domestic violence and developing a "report on the state of local domestic violence."

ECCAFV's goal in producing this profile is to provide a non-biased "snapshot" on domestic violence for use by interested citizens, civic and nonprofit groups, academics, and local, state, and federal legislators. This publication is the first of multiple products the committee wishes to create on the topic of domestic violence. The profile contains publicly available data from a national, state, and local perspective. Subsequent profiles will be created in order to offer relevant and up-to-date information on this and other important issues facing the Erie County population.

Ideally, this and subsequent reports will be used in assessing community needs; engaging in planning activities; establishing goals; and developing resources. When using this profile, please take careful note of references and comments in order to fully understand the ideas being offered and to ensure proper use of the information presented.

**It is important to understand that this profile is aimed to give a "snapshot" of the use of current services. The following data is not a reflection of domestic violence rates or incidences. It is not comprehensive, but is instead a compilation of publicly available information.**

For the purposes of this report, ECCAFV uses the New York State's Model Domestic Violence Policy for Counties definition of domestic violence which is a "pattern of coercive tactics which can include physical, psychological, sexual, economic, and emotional abuse, perpetrated by one person against an adult intimate partner, with the goal of establishing and maintaining power and control over the victim" (NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, 1998). Domestic violence occurs in all kinds of intimate relationships, including married couples, people who are dating, couples who live together, people with children in common, same-sex partners, people who were

formerly in a relationship with the person abusing them, and teen dating violence (NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, 2006).

In the pages that follow we offer a reflection on key national and state-wide domestic violence procedures before discussing the use of current services in Buffalo and Erie County. We also describe some of the difficulties associated with compiling domestic violence statistics and suggest opportunities for future data collections. This report begins with an overview of domestic violence in the United States.

### **Domestic Violence in the United States**

Domestic violence is one of the most prevalent acts of violence perpetrated against women. It is the leading cause of female injury in almost every country in the world (Human Rights Watch, 2003).

Here in the United States, domestic violence has been acknowledged and defined, recognized in law, and countered with programs ranging from counseling to shelters to hotlines to enforcement training and judicial reform. While national violent crime rates – including rates of domestic violence - have declined or leveled off, reaching the lowest levels ever in 2005 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005), as many as four million women are assaulted by spouses or partners and more than 1,000 are killed each year (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005). One in four women will be involved in an incident of domestic violence in their lifetime (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2005).

On November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, 1,243 out of the 2,016 (62%) local domestic violence programs across the US participated in the National Census of Domestic Violence Services administered by the National Network to End Domestic Violence. An unduplicated, non-invasive count of adults and children who received services from local domestic violence programs was collected during a 24-hour period.

- 16,644 hotline calls were answered averaging over 11 calls every minute;
- 22,277 victims of domestic violence received housing services from a domestic violence program through emergency shelters (14,344) or transitional housing (7,933):
- 25,587 victims received non-residential services including counseling;
- 40,120 individuals were educated about domestic violence prevention through community programs; and
- 5,157 requests for services from adults and children went unmet

The information gathered by the National Network to End Domestic Violence provided the first ever view of “a day in the life of domestic violence” in the United States and emphasized services rendered to victims and their families. The snapshot did not,

however, provide a clear picture of those receiving assistance. For this, one must rely on victim profile data.

According to the most recent victim profile data available from the Bureau of Justice (1998-2002), roughly eleven percent (or 3.5 million) of the 32 million victims of violent crime were victims of family violence (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007). Among them, 49% were crimes against spouses, 11% were sons or daughters victimized by a parent, and 41% were crimes against other family members. The most common type of family violence offense was simple assault with less than one percent of family violence offenses including murder.

Females were much more likely than males to be victims of domestic violence or other forms of family violence. Females comprised 51.6% of the U.S. population (age 12 or older) between 1998 and 2002 but they totaled 73.4% of the nation's victims of family violence. Similarly, 84.3% of spousal abuse victims and 85.9% of the victims of violence between boyfriends and girlfriends were female.

From 1998-2002, nearly 4 out of 5 violent offenders were male. Males accounted for 75.6% of domestic violence offenders and 80.4% of non-family violence offenders. Among violent crimes against a spouse, 86.1% of the offenders were male; against a boyfriend or girlfriend, 82.4%; and against a stranger, 86% of the offenders were male.

There is little variation in the experience of domestic violence by race. Whites and blacks were only slightly more likely than Hispanics or persons of other races to be victimized by family violence. Between 1998 and 2002, non-Hispanic whites were 72.9% of the U.S. population age 12 or older but 74% of family violence victims. Non-Hispanic blacks were 12.1% of the population age 12 or older but 13.6% of family violence victims. By contrast, Hispanics were 10.9% of the population age 12 or older but 10.1% of family violence victims.

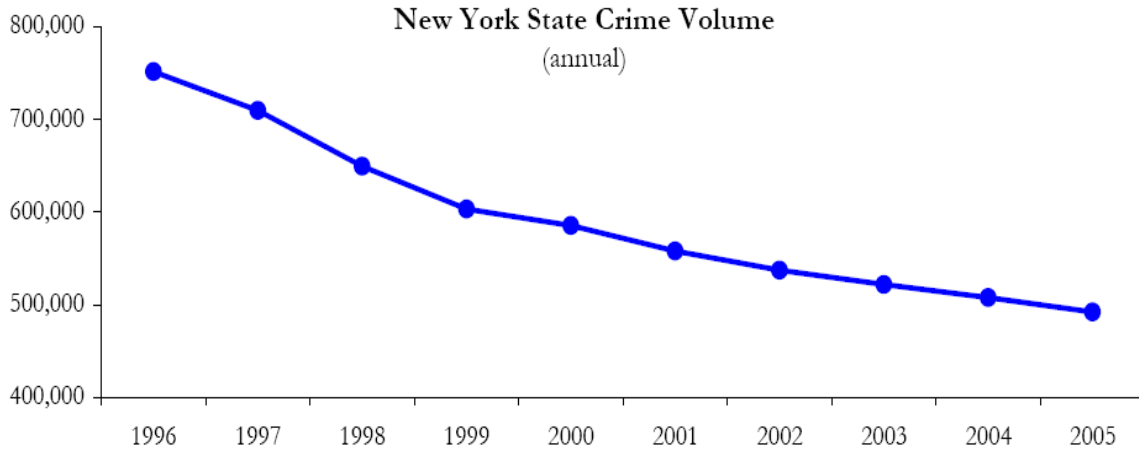
Notably, national estimates suggest that between 59-73% of domestic violence assaults go unreported, due in large part to lack of faith in the current system or lack of reporting by police (Bureau of Justice, 2005; National Institute of Justice, 2005). In response, some 300 integrated domestic violence courts have sprung up in at least 23 states across the country. While the structure of courts varies based on state and local needs, they all use a "one family, one judge" model. Each victim is provided an advocate, and a dedicated judge and team of prosecutors see each case from beginning to end, dealing with whatever criminal charges, protection orders, and custody and divorce matters arise. Today, domestic violence accounts for nearly 15% of total court costs nationwide (Family Violence Prevention Fund, 2007).

In addition to court costs, more than five billion dollars are spent annually for medical and mental health expenses related to domestic violence (Campaign for Funding to End Violence Against Women, 2006a). Approximately 100 million dollars is lost by businesses annually through lost productivity, sick leave, and absenteeism due to

domestic violence (Borz and Howard, 2007; Campaign for Funding to End Violence Against Women, 2006b; National Violence Against Women Survey, 2000).

**Domestic Violence in New York State**

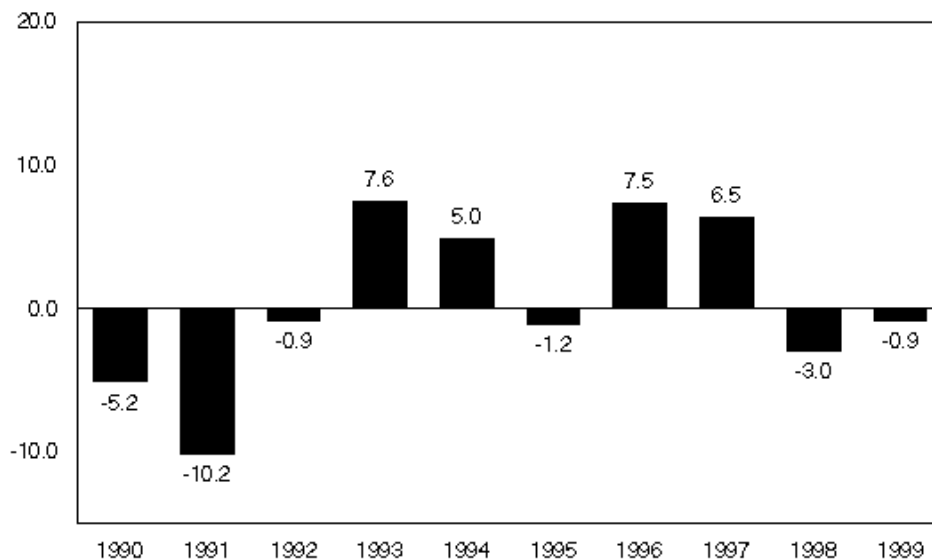
Just as it has nationally, violent crime rates have also declined within New York State over the last ten years according to the Crimestat system (NYS Criminal Justice, 2006).



Source: FBI, Crime in the United States, 2005

Similarly, a reduction and subsequent leveling off of domestic violence incidence reporting has also been documented within the state which carried on through the early years of this decade (NYS Criminal Justice, 2000).

**New York State Annual Percentage Changes in Domestic Violence**



Based on county-wide reporting data, New York State has seen a six percentage point decline (from 57% in 1997 to 51% in 2000) in average domestic violence charging practices in cases where injury following a serious physical attack is involved (Fernandez-Lanier, Chard-Wierschem, and Hall, 2002). Despite the reduction in domestic violence reporting, the state continues to see nearly 450,000 Domestic Incident Reports (DIRs) completed by police officers each year (NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, 2006).

DIRs are kept with the intent of recording and monitoring any events where police are investigating a report of a crime or offense between members of the same family or household. Please note that a domestic violence incident does not necessarily have to involve a crime or offense of the law. It, likewise, does not have to result in an arrest. Every dispatched domestic violence call requires the completion and filing of a DIR by the responding police officer(s). The DIR should reflect any statements made by the victim or witnesses and should include any information regarding current or past involvement of domestic violence service providers or agencies. A copy of the DIR should be made immediately available to the victim and the pertinent law enforcement agency must keep copies of all DIRs on record for at least four years.

In addition to DIRs, records are kept on the number of orders of protection obtained. Since 1994, over 1.4 million orders of protection have been entered into the New York State Family Protection Registry with 123,649 temporary and final orders entered in 2005 (NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, 2006). Orders of protection can be issued by Criminal, Family, or Supreme Court. Receipt of an order of protection is often a first step toward gaining independence, but is by no means a guarantee of safety or the end of the cycle of violence. Nevertheless, there are several advantages to acquiring an order of protection include: highlighting the importance of particular emergency calls for law enforcement agencies; ensuring that an abuser is arrested and jailed if he violates the order; convicting an abuser for violating the order; aiding in protection of victims at their workplace; and informing the abuser to stay away from victim, his/her children, and other caregivers.

Finally, domestic violence cases are heard in family court and criminal courts (including city and town) as well as New York's 25 Domestic Violence and 28 Integrated Domestic Violence Courts (NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, 2006). A description of each follows below.

### *Domestic Violence Courts*

Domestic Violence Courts (DV Courts) are specialized courts that handle both misdemeanor and felony criminal cases. They are characterized by a single presiding judge, a fixed prosecutorial team, as well as specialized staffing including a resource coordinator and victim advocates. DV Courts also strive to promote a quick and consistent response to domestic violence while ensuring victim safety and access to services. They also monitor offender compliance with orders of protection and provide judicial oversight of cases from the day of arraignment through post-disposition.

To provide an effective continuum of screening, monitoring, and referral of cases, DV Courts possess various elements. A single “dedicated” judge presides over a case rather than parties having to appear in front of multiple judges making the process more comprehensive and less confusing. The Resource Coordinator is responsible for preparing offender and victim information for the judge, monitors the accountability of relevant agencies, and identifies any problems or inefficiencies. The On-Site Victim Advocate is the primary contact for victims who can help create safety plans, find housing and counseling, coordinates social services, provides information about criminal proceedings, and can explain conditions involved with orders of protection.

DV Courts also partake in regular research and evaluation of their institutions and practices. This allows them to monitor their collaborations within the community; obtain feedback; analyze procedures; and examine the success and usage of interventions within victim service programs. Additionally, they are able to study offender compliance with court orders and keep track of recidivism.

### *Integrated Domestic Violence Courts*

Integrated Domestic Violence Courts (IDV) are specialized Supreme Court parts developed to better serve families in crisis. Historically, the court structure required domestic violence victims and their families to appear in multiple courts (in front of multiple judges) to address their criminal, family, matrimonial and other legal problems. IDV Courts, by contrast, are dedicated to the idea of "one family-one judge," allowing a single judge to hear related cases involving domestic violence victims and their families. The goal of the court is to change the way the justice system treats families and children by promoting more informed judicial decision-making, creating consistency in orders of protection and reducing court appearances, as well as providing enhanced services to victims and ensuring defendant accountability.

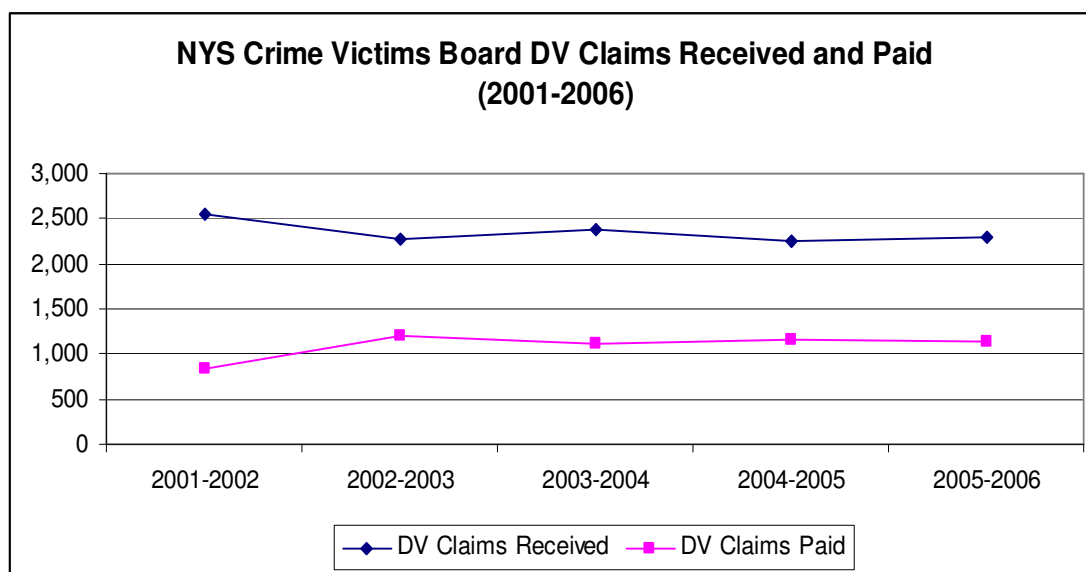
Related criminal, matrimonial, and family court cases that are filed within the same county and involve a single family may be eligible for the IDV Court. Allegations of criminal domestic violence form the basic threshold requirement for entry into the IDV while, it is also required that cases are also heard in at least two of the three areas of law. Although the cases will be heard in the IDV, each case will retain its individual integrity and will not be consolidated with one another.

The IDV Court focuses on the coordination of related domestic violence cases, victim safety, defendant accountability and addressing the needs of families affected by domestic violence. They are unlike Drug Courts where the primary goal is the rehabilitation of the criminal defendant. In IDV Courts, judicial monitoring of offenders is the cornerstone and there is a compliance component to address issues of defendant accountability. In addition, IDV Courts also assist families in accessing community services and resources in a coordinated manner.

## *New York State's Crime Victims Board*

The New York State Crime Victims Board was created under Article 22 of the Executive Law to compensate innocent victims of crime for un-reimbursed out-of-pocket expenses. Since its establishment on August 1, 1966, the Board has provided substantial financial relief to victims of crime and their families by paying crime-related expenses including medical and funeral expenses; loss of earnings or support; counseling; crime scene clean-up expenses; the cost to repair or replace items of essential personal property; reasonable court transportation expenses; and the cost of residing at or utilizing the services of a domestic violence shelter.

Since 2001, the New York State Crime Victims Board has received more than 11,750 claims related to domestic violence and paid more than \$10 million dollars to domestic violence victims. These figures do not, however, take into account for the number of domestic violence incidents that are unreported to the police. In 2005 alone, CVB Victim Assistance Programs assisted 93,566 victims of domestic violence (NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, 2006).



New York State has also spent over \$103 million in government and private revenue to provide services to victims of domestic violence and their children since the beginning of the decade. New York State agencies, such as the Office of Children and Family Services, Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, and Department of Health and others, disseminated millions of dollars in funding to communities in New York State to support domestic violence and sexual assault efforts on the local level (Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, 2007).

## *New York State Domestic Violence Programming*

Within New York State, there are 65 residential domestic violence service providers which are licensed by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). Oversight for these programs is provided by OCFS including thirty domestic violence programs/shelters; twenty-eight safe dwellings; and seven safe home networks. A description of each category follows.

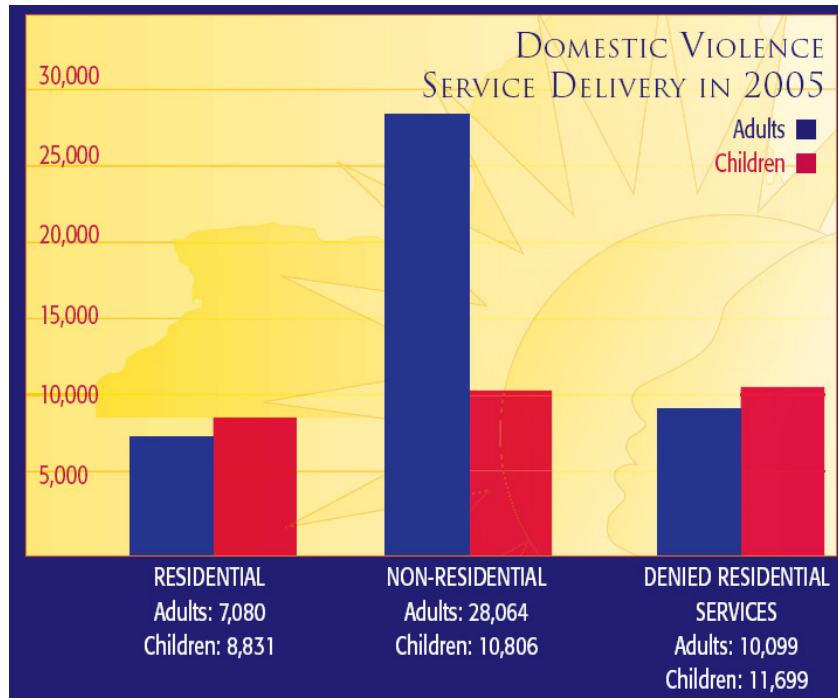
Domestic Violence Shelter- A congregate residential facility with a capacity of 10 or more persons including adults and children which is organized for the exclusive purpose of providing temporary shelter and emergency services to care for victims of domestic violence and their minor children (if any).

Domestic Violence Program- In order to be classified as a domestic violence program, 70% of the program population must be determined to be victims of domestic violence (children are included in this number). The remaining 30% of clients may consist of persons who are not victims of domestic violence, however, these persons must not jeopardize the safety and well-being of the program participants that are victims of domestic violence.

Domestic Violence Safe Dwelling- A safe dwelling is a self-contained residence which is owned, leased, rented, or otherwise under the control and supervision of a domestic violence program sponsoring agency. The safe dwelling meets the daily living needs of the residents and has a capacity of nine or fewer persons including adults and children. The dwelling is secured as specified in 18 NYCRR, Section 455.8 and must be designated by the domestic violence sponsoring agency to provide temporary shelter exclusively to victims of domestic violence.

Safe Home Network- An organized network of private homes offering temporary shelter and emergency services and care to victims of domestic violence and their minor children that is coordinated by a not-for-profit organization. A Safe Home is a self-contained private residence which is owned, leased, rented or otherwise under the direct control of a single person or family or two or more unrelated persons which has been approved by a safe home network for the purpose of providing temporary shelter to victims of domestic violence and their minor children, if any.

In total, the State of New York provides 2,768 shelter beds to victims of domestic violence. In 2005, residential programs served more than 15,000 domestic violence victims and their children. However, over 22,000 were denied residential assistance for various reasons (NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, 2006).



In addition to residential services, more than 38,000 individuals received non-residential assistance including information and referral, advocacy, and counseling. The New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) approves domestic violence non-residential service providers in the state but does not offer any licensing for such programs. Oversight for these programs is provided by county-level Departments of Social Service.

Non-residential service providers approved by OCFS have various mandatory requirements in order to maintain their approval.

#### Mandatory Requirements for Core Services:

- Services must be provided on a daily basis from 9:00am-5:00pm;
- Telephone Hotline Assistance (does not need to be available on nights, weekends, holidays);
- Information and Referral;
- Case Advocacy;
- Counseling; and
- Community Education and Outreach Services

Optional Services include children's services, support groups, transportation, and translation services.

## **Domestic Violence in Erie County**

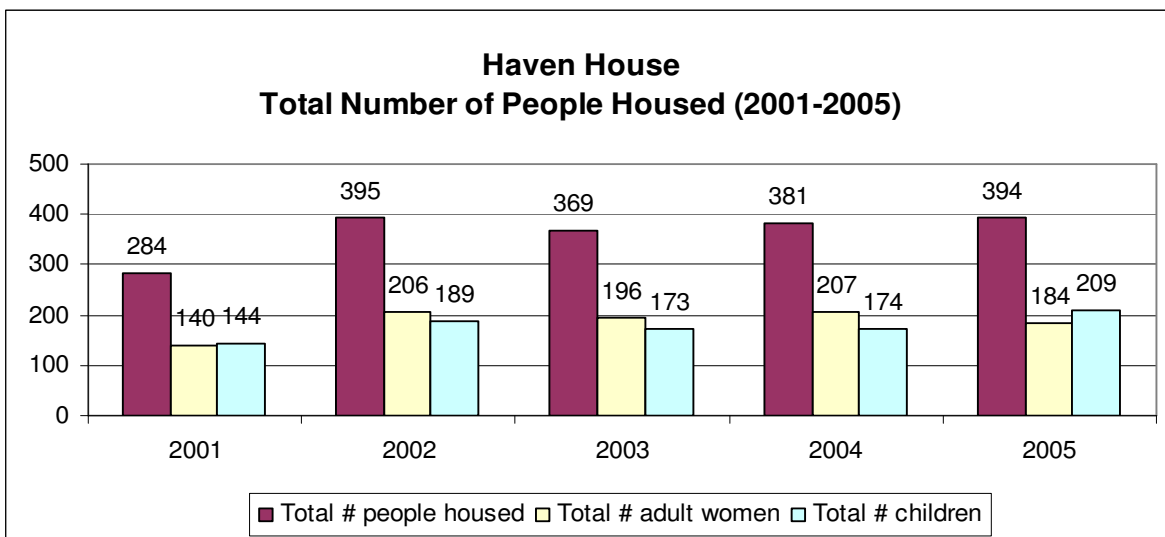
Within Erie County, New York State Office of Children and Family Services licenses two residential service providers: Child & Family Services Haven House and Community Services for the Developmentally Disabled Safe House.

### *Domestic Violence OCFS Licensed Residential Programs*

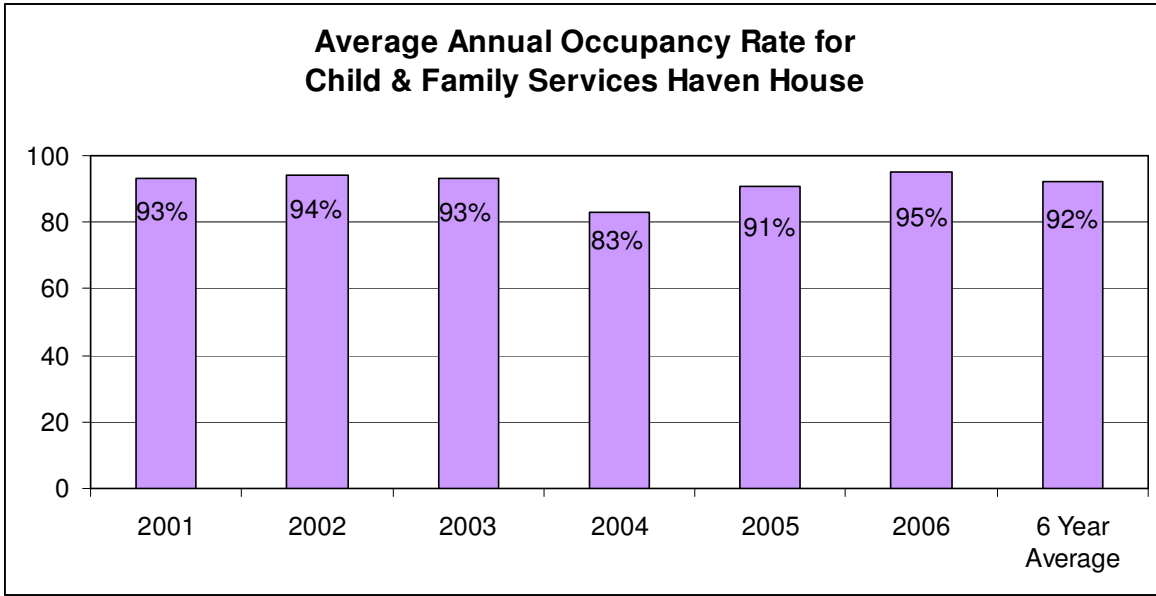
#### Child & Family Services' Haven House

Child & Family Services' Haven House provides safe, confidential services for victims of domestic violence including a safe shelter for women and children (36 person bed capacity). Shelter services are available to:

- All female victims of domestic violence 18 years or older, or female victims 16 years or older with children, regardless of their sexual orientation;
- Victims being abused by a parent, step-parent or other relative, where the primary victim is the child; and
- Victims being abused by a partner, husband, ex-partner, boyfriend or lover.



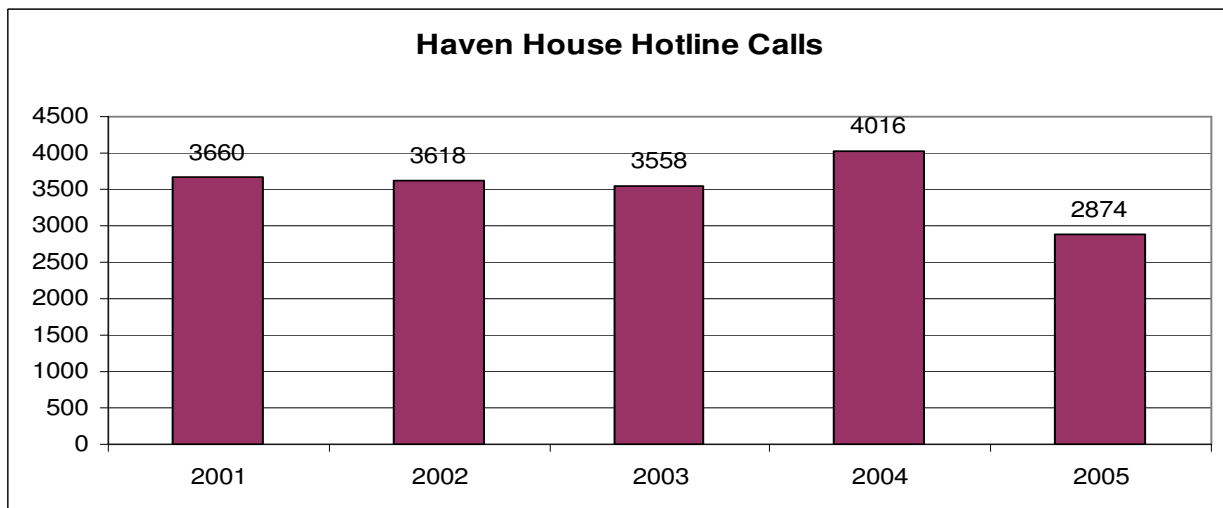
Over the last five years, Haven House has averaged 364 occupants in a given year. The data displayed above gives a breakdown of total occupants per year as well as information about the number of adult women and children housed through the program.



The average occupancy rate for Haven House was 92% from 2001-2006. With the exception of 2004, the occupancy rate of the shelter has been consistently above 90% annually.

While in shelter, individuals have access to information and referral services, individual and group counseling, advocacy services, legal consultation, and recreation and therapeutic programming (especially for children). Child & Family Services Haven House is also licensed to operate a Safe Home Network in the rural area of Erie County where individuals could stay for up to one week.

Child & Family Services Haven House is the only service provider in Erie County that is both a licensed residential service provider and an approved non-residential service provider. These categorizations require that Haven House provide a hotline number that is answered by a counselor 24-hours a day, 7-days a week.

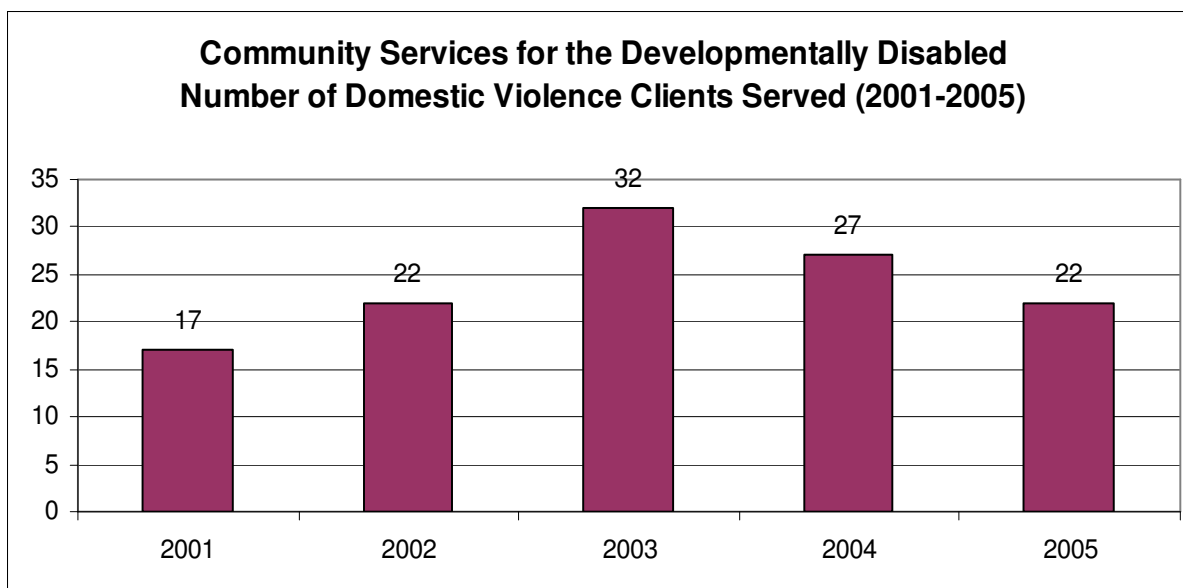


The chart on the previous page describes the use of the Haven House Hotline from 2001 to 2005. The average number of calls per year during that period was 3,545 calls or approximately ten calls per day.

### Community Services for the Developmentally Disabled

Community Services for the Developmentally Disabled began offering services to individuals with developmental disabilities in 1989. Several years later, after identifying the need for safe shelter for victims of domestic violence, CSDD opened Project S.A.F.E. (Shelter and Assistance in Family Emergencies).

Project S.A.F.E. provides confidential shelter and counseling for survivors of family violence with developmental disabilities. Families receive the safety and support they need at the Safe House, while gaining valuable support and guidance from staff. Over the last several years, Project SAFE has seen steady use of its facility with an average of 24 individuals staying at the facility per year.

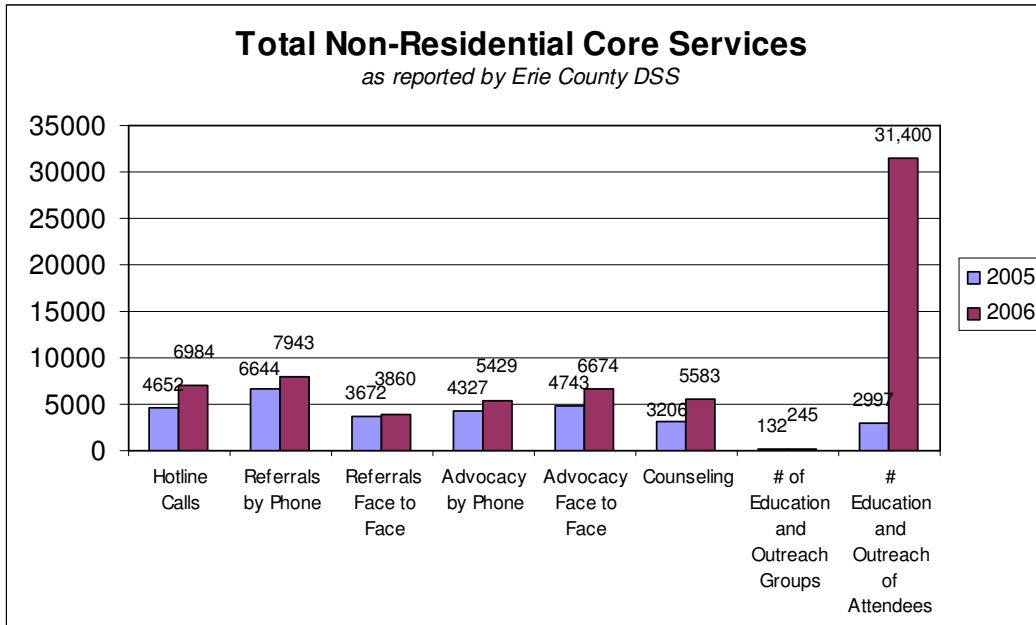


### *Domestic Violence OCFS-Approved Non-Residential Service Providers*

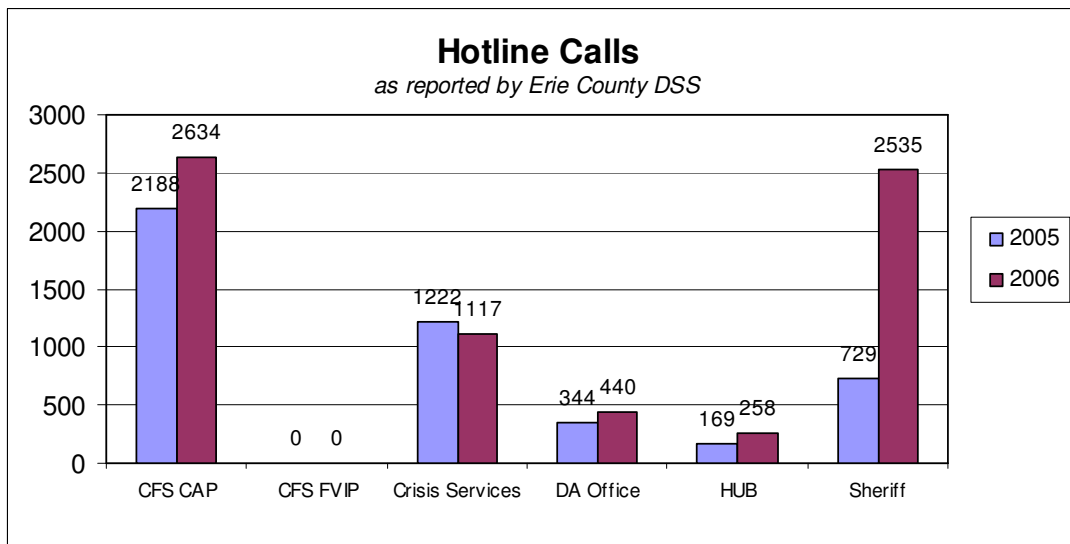
In addition to its residential services, Erie County currently has six OCFS-Approved non-residential domestic violence service providers. These facilities provide a variety of services including hotlines, counseling, support, and advocacy services (see: Description of Services in the Appendix).

While many of these programs receive funding from various sources, they all receive funding from and report numbers to the Erie County Department of Social Services. **The “numbers of clients served as reported to Erie County” do not encompass all clients assisted by approved non-residential programs.** However, for the purposes of this profile, they paint a picture of county-funded programming.

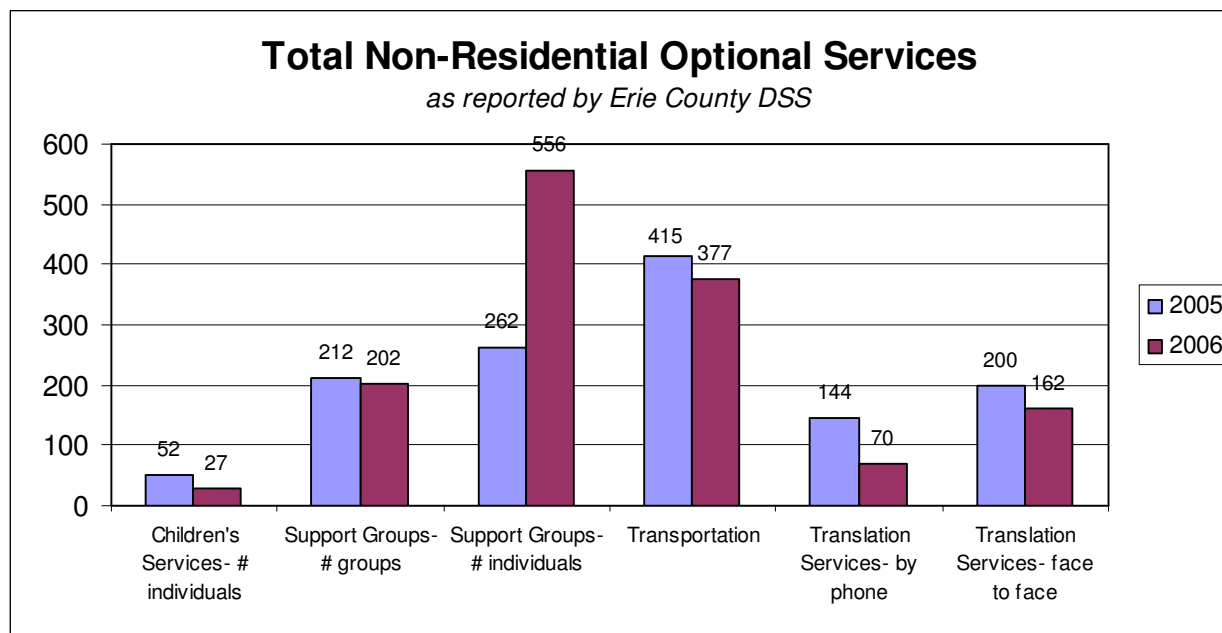
The following charts illustrate the services provided by the OCFS-Approved programs in 2005 and 2006 as reported to the Erie County Department of Social Services. The programs represented by these numbers are: Child & Family Services Family Violence Intervention Program, Child & Family Services Haven House Counseling and Advocacy Program, Crisis Services Advocate Program, Erie County District Attorney's Office BE SAFE Program, Erie County Sheriff's Office, Hispanics United of Buffalo.



Hotline calls, referrals, and face-to-face advocacy appear to be the most common means of providing services to victims of domestic violence. The dramatic increase in the number of education and outreach group attendees is notable and attributable to new outreach strategies implemented by the Erie County Sheriff's Office, additional explanation follows.



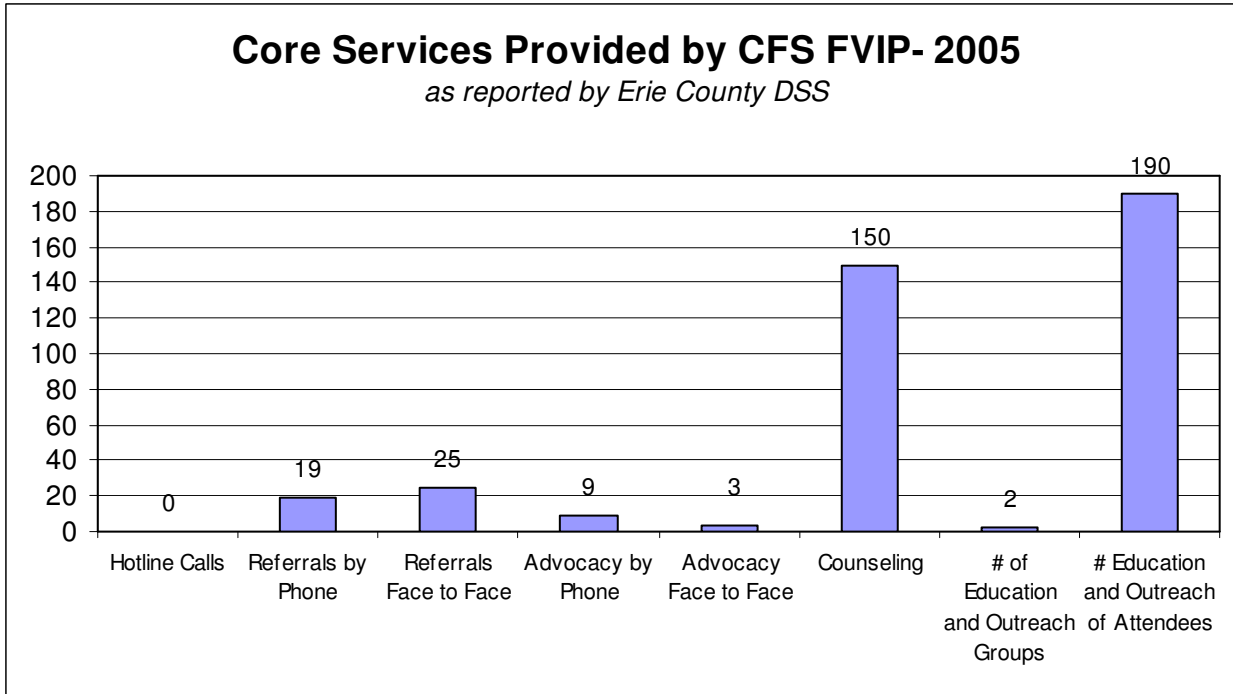
In addition to providing the core services required by the OCFS, all of the approved non-residential programs also offer some optional services as shown in the chart below.



The optional services offered by the approved non-residential services providers are much less than the core services offered. However, the previous chart highlights the need for transportation services. This need is consistent with other segments of services providers in the county as there are several other task forces and coalitions which focus on transportation needs for low income and disadvantaged groups. Also notable is the low number of children's services offered by these non-residential programs.

#### Child & Family Services Family Violence Intervention Program

The Child & Family Services Family Violence Intervention Program (FVIP) operated as an OCFS-Approved, non-residential domestic service provider. FVIP offered support group assistance to adults and children who experienced or witnessed domestic violence. The group consisted of self-referred and court mandated members. Importantly, FVIP was closed from June 1, 2005 to April 3, 2006 due to Erie County Department of Social Service budget cuts. As a result, the program provided a diminished level of services during this time.



As of April 1<sup>st</sup> 2007, FVIP was merged with Haven House in order to create one unified therapeutic continuum of care for victims of domestic violence who are in need of non-residential services. The program now operates under the auspices of the Child & Family Services Haven House Counseling and Advocacy Program described below.

#### Child & Family Services Haven House Counseling and Advocacy Program

The Counseling and Advocacy Program (CAP) is the non-residential component of Haven House. CAP serves between 1,500 and 2,000 victims of domestic violence each year, providing hotline assistance, individualized safety planning and supportive counseling, support groups, advocacy, court accompaniment and electronic safety devices to victims of domestic violence leaving shelter and/or living in the community. In addition, all advocates and counselors provide crisis intervention, information and referrals and linkages for services outside of Haven House. Child supervision is available on a limited basis so that victims can meet privately with their counselor. CAP staff are frequently called upon to provide community education and outreach, as well.

Three counselors provide individual and group counseling throughout Erie County. Counselors meet with clients at convenient and confidential locations throughout the county. Support groups are offered in several locations and times. An Art Empowerment Group, part of a unique nationally renowned art empowerment project, is available for survivors on a weekly basis.

In 2005 and part of 2006, a 4-week, 10-hour Domestic Violence Education Program was offered to clients mandated to attend domestic violence services from the ECDSS or the Courts. Also in 2005 and part of 2006, one counselor was dedicated to assisting clients

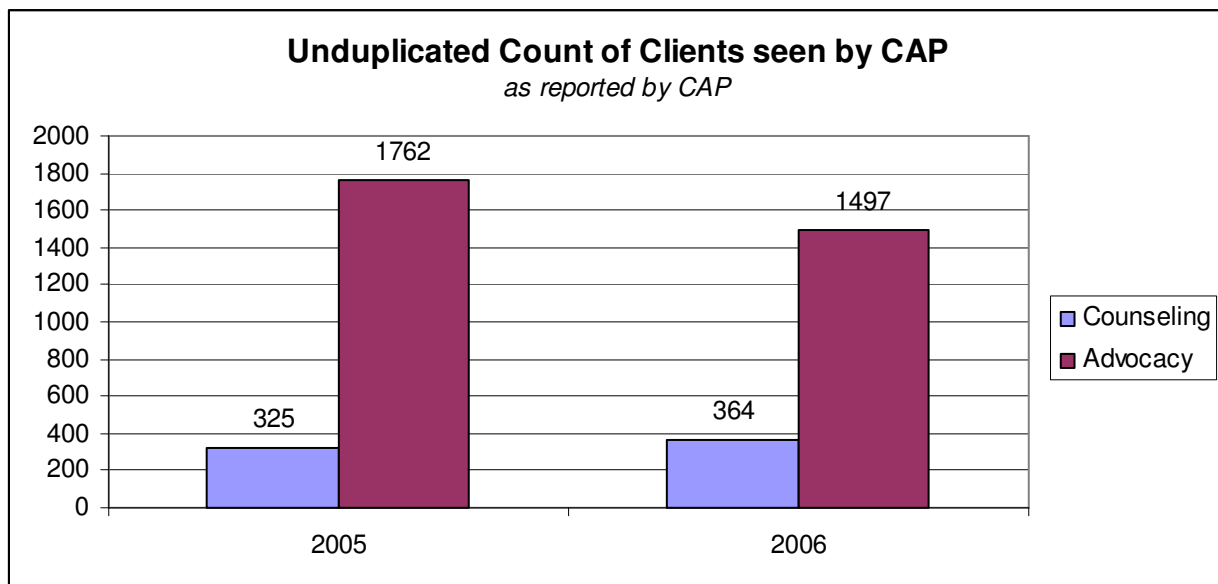
become economically self sufficient through developing job seeking skills and linkage with education and training; 59 survivors obtained employment. In 2006 and 2007, one counselor / advocate was assigned to the Family Justice Center of Erie County.

CAP has formed multiple community partnerships and collaborations, which has allowed the program to expand services to victims. As of April 2007, CAP has had advocates partnered with (and in many cases directly located at) the following organizations;

- Erie County District Attorneys Office – Be Safe Program (Justice Courts)
- Erie County Family Court
- Erie County Felony Domestic Violence Court
- Erie County Integrated Domestic Violence Court
- Erie County Probation Department
- Family Justice Center of Erie County
- Kenmore Police Department/Catholic Charities
- Supreme Court - Expedited Matrimonial Part

Advocates assist victims in navigating the complex justice systems they must access in seeking safety by providing support and information. Advocates also work with the systems to obtain positive outcomes for victim safety.

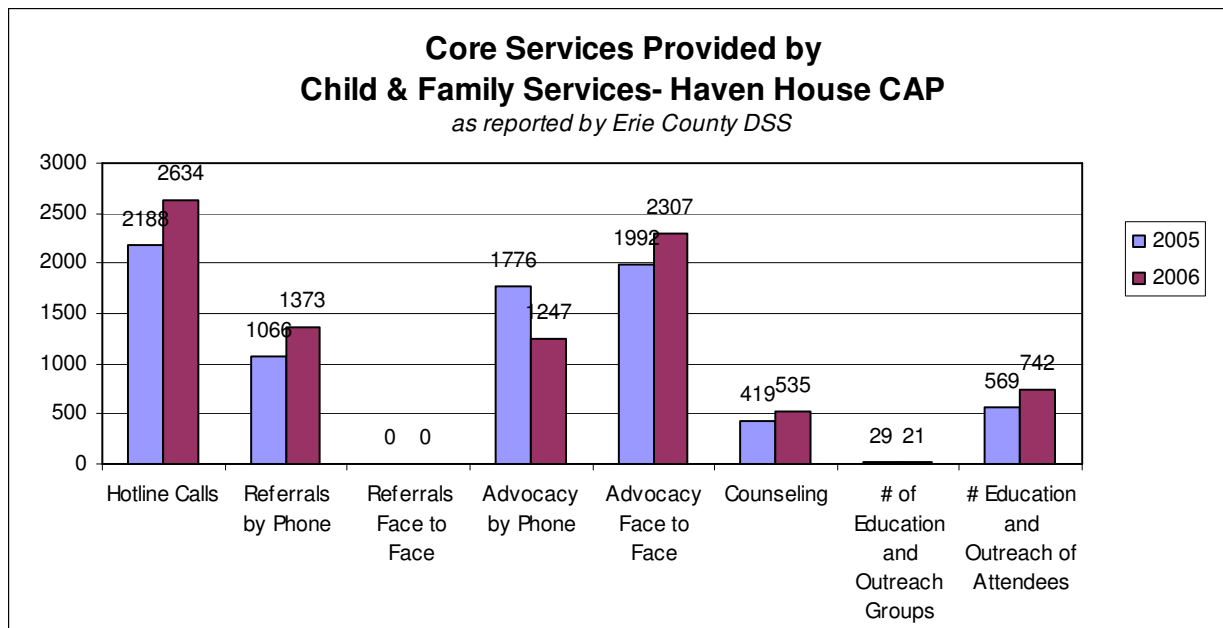
CAP reported the number clients seen by the program. The unduplicated counts for 2005 and 2006 are:



Counseling clients were seen for individual counseling, employment assistance, domestic violence education or support group. Advocacy clients received some form of advocacy (criminal, civil, social service, housing, employment, etc.).

Currently, as of April 1, 2007, the former Child & Family Services Family Violence Intervention Program was merged with Haven House Counseling and Advocacy Program. CAP now has a staff of 19, providing comprehensive non-residential services to victims of domestic violence and their children.

In 2007, CAP is planning on adding a new advocate position to serve the Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual and Transgendered (LGBT) population and to develop Safe Homes in Erie County. This position resulted from collaboration with the WNY LGBT Domestic Violence Committee.



### Crisis Services Advocate Program

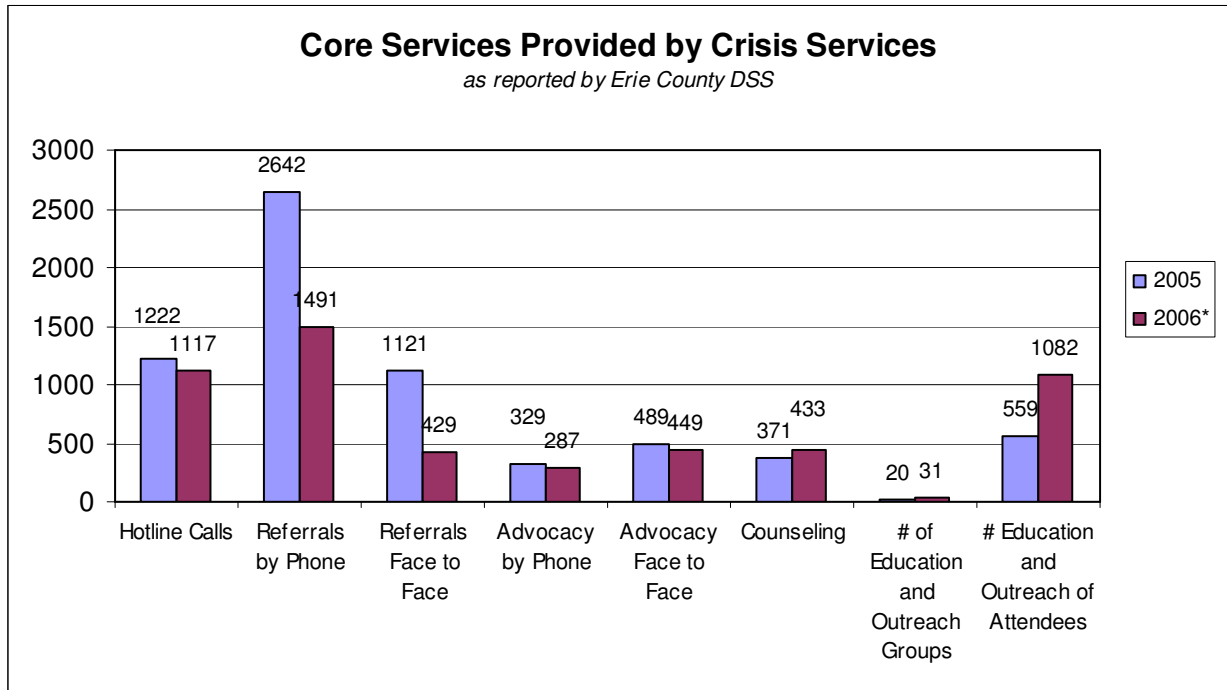
Crisis Services is dedicated to promoting the health and well-being of the Buffalo and Erie County community through prevention, education, immediate intervention, and access to resources 24-hours a day. A menu of services is provided to individuals based on their needs. Services are also available to family members and significant others.

The Crisis Services Advocate Program provides 24-hour a day, 7-day a week confidential response and support for survivors of rape, sexual assault, domestic violence, family violence and elder abuse. All clients who are referred to the Advocate Program are offered the following services:

- 24-Hour Hotline assistance for information, referrals or immediate assistance;
- Immediate Crisis Intervention and Support at all Erie County Emergency Departments;
- Case Management Services;
- Criminal Justice Advocacy;

- Individual Therapy; and
- Linkage to NYS Crime Victim Board Compensation

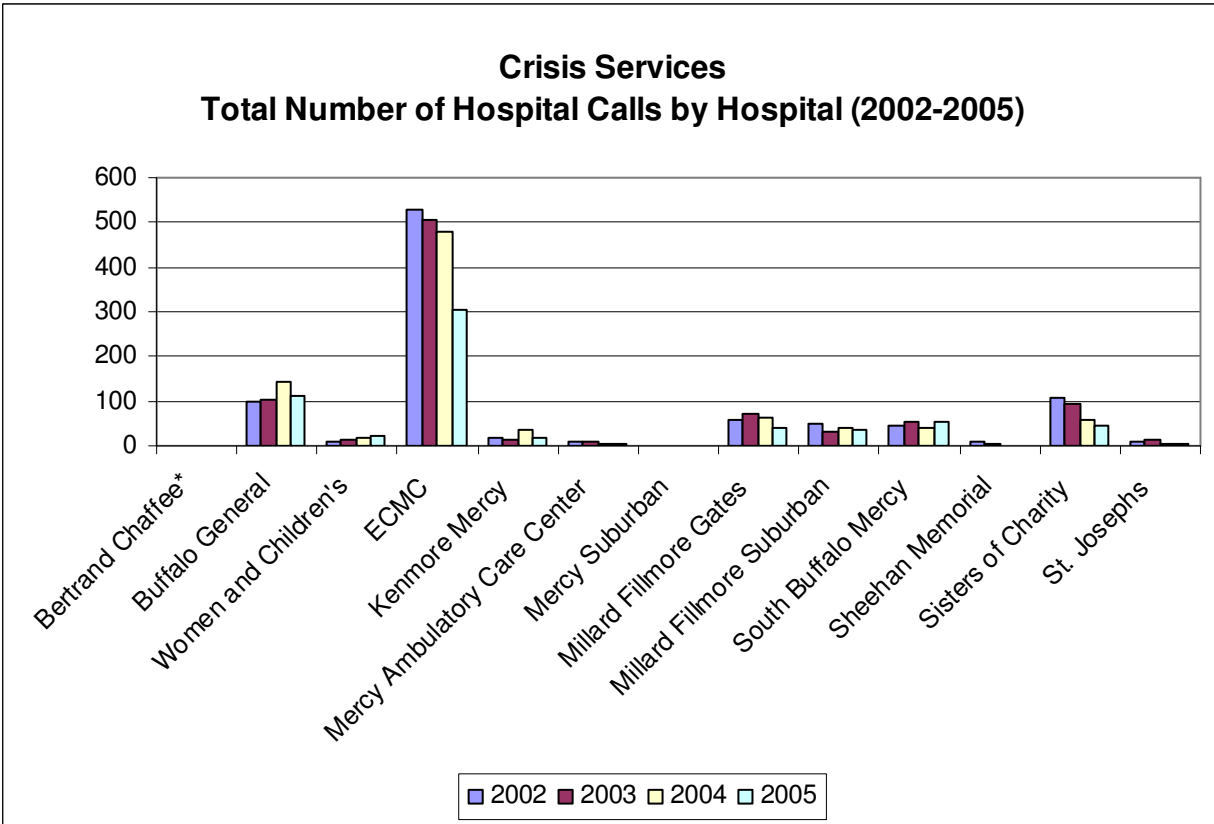
Advocate Staff are also stationed at the following locations: Buffalo Police Dept. Sex Offense Section located at the Family Justice Center, Buffalo City Court Domestic Violence Part, Erie County Sheriff's Office and the Town of Tonawanda Police Department.



\* The 2006 data reported above reflect the number of clients served by the two Crisis Services staff funded directly by the Erie County Department of Social Services.

In 2006, the Advocate Program responded to 344 sexual assault hospital calls and 638 domestic violence hospital calls at Erie County's Emergency Departments. The combined hours of Advocate Program staff and volunteers spent on domestic violence hospital interventions was approximately 790 hours and for sexual assault hospital interventions approximately 1,520 hours.

During this time period, the 24-hour hotline received 1,119 domestic violence calls and 351 sexual assault-related calls. Over 970 female and 115 male victims of domestic violence or family violence were served by the Advocate Program. Over 490 female and 27 male victims of sexual assault or rape were served by the Advocate Program. A total of 169 individuals received Advocate Program therapy services.



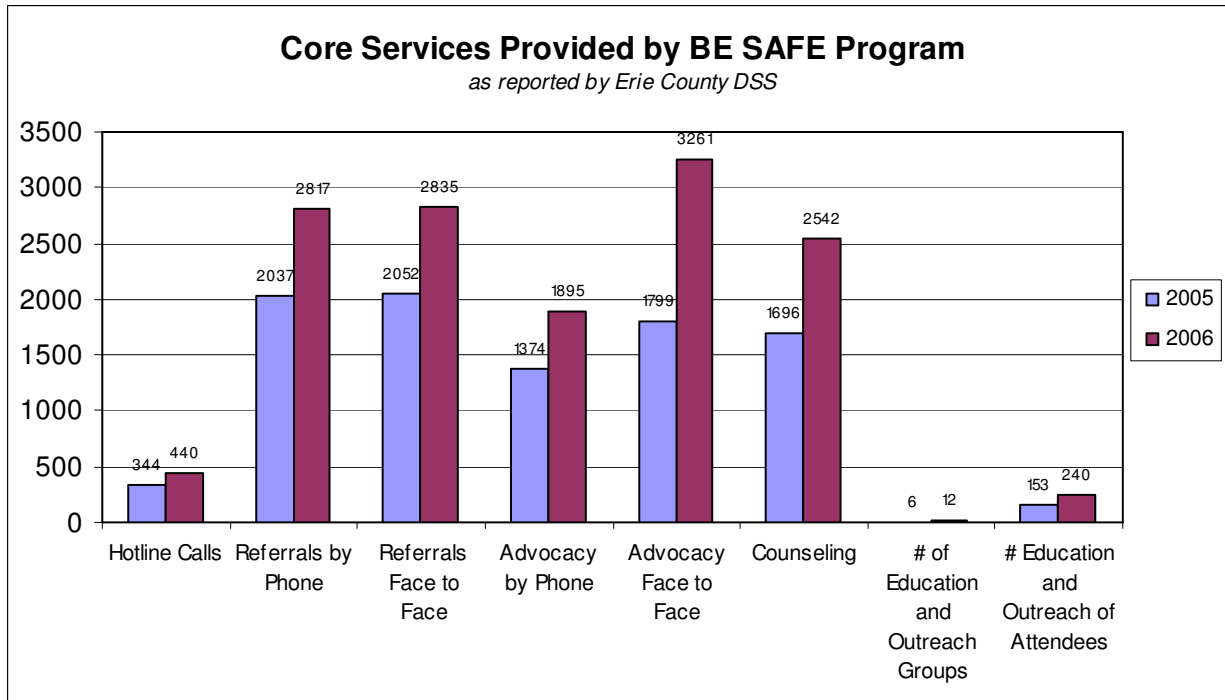
The vast majority of hospital calls come from the Erie County Medical Center followed by Buffalo General Hospital. Over the last four years, Crisis Services has identified a decline in the number of individuals seeking assistance while in the hospital.

#### Erie County District Attorney's Office BE SAFE Program

The Buffalo and Erie County Stopping Abuse in the Family Environment (BE SAFE) Program is a non-residential domestic violence program within the Domestic Violence Bureau of the Erie County District Attorney's Office. The program is staffed by trained social workers, victim's advocates, attorneys and investigators. BE SAFE services are available to anyone and are not exclusive to individuals who have a criminal case pending. Current services include:

- Domestic Violence education and support to survivors of domestic/family violence;
- Supportive counseling;
- Safety planning and risk assessment;
- Information, referral and linkage to other agencies;
- Services to Spanish-speaking clients;
- Hotline; and
- Community outreach and education about domestic violence and the legal system.

BE SAFE Advocates are a source of information and referral about the criminal court system for clients. They are specially trained to advocate for clients throughout each step of the court process. Specialized services include: court advocacy and accompaniment and direct linkage to the Office of the District Attorney.



### Erie County Sheriff’s Office

The Erie County Sheriff’s Office Domestic Violence Unit specialists and advocates respond immediately to domestic situations and calls for assistance from victims of domestic violence. This service is provided 24-hours a day, 7-days a week. The immediate response to these calls is a major strength to this unit.

Domestic Violence specialists and advocates assigned to the Erie County Sheriff’s Office possess the unique abilities required to properly investigate inherently complex and sensitive incidences of family violence for the Domestic Violence Unit. These specialists and advocates maintain a close working relationship with other advocate groups throughout the state, county and local areas. The services of these specialists and advocates are available to all municipalities in Erie County. The Family Court Child Support Enforcement Unit serves orders of protection issued against respondents living in Erie County regardless of the municipality in which they reside.

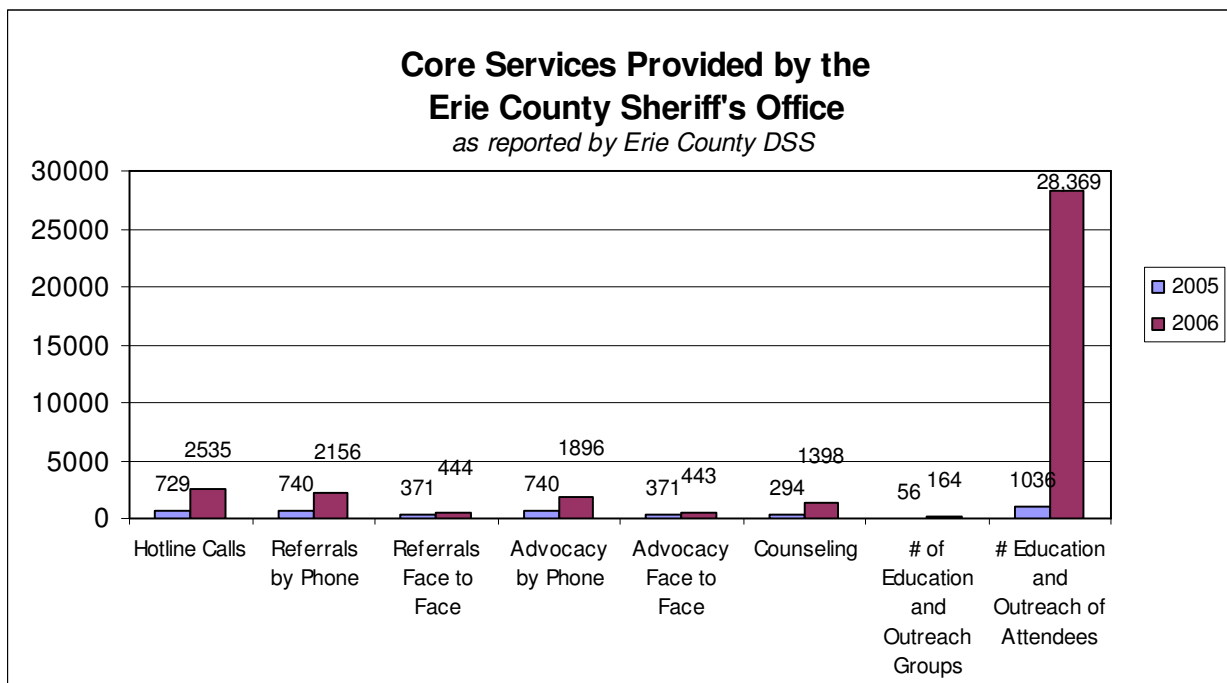
Victims are seen immediately at their location, at the Erie County Sheriff’s Office Domestic Violence Unit Office, or at any of the Sheriff’s substations located throughout Erie County. Most rural victims prefer to receive these services in their own municipality. This unit brings services to them in their rural settings where they feel most comfortable.

One of the strengths of this unit is the ability to provide services to Native Americans in rural populations. A Seneca-speaking specialist responds to requests throughout the area including those received on Native American reservations in Erie, Cattaraugus and Niagara Counties.

The Domestic Violence Unit and Family Court / Child Support Enforcement Unit of the Erie County Sheriff's Office, an OFCS-approved non-residential service provider, is pro-active in its approach to domestic violence prevention.

The Erie County Sheriff's Office Domestic Violence Unit actively participates in county coalitions, task forces and also offers community prevention education and training on a variety of topics including dating violence, elder abuse and cultural competency.

Clearly, an additional strength of the Erie County Sheriff's Office Domestic Violence Unit is their ability to compile and analyze data. Consequently this data helps to determine where the preponderance of domestic violence responses occurred and therefore focus their services and / or educational trainings to those particular areas.



In 2006, the Sheriff's Office participated in an education outreach program which reached thousands of people to get the word out about domestic violence. For example, they had booth set up at the Erie County Fair for ten days as well as a booth at the Eastern Hills Mall which included the fingerprinting unit for the Operation Safe Child program of the Erie County Sheriff's Office. New outreach strategies such as these account for the tremendous increase in numbers for education and outreach from 2005 to 2006.

## Family Justice Center

The Family Justice Center has been an OCFS-Approved non-residential domestic violence service provider since 01/01/2007. A new program that opened its doors to clients in March, 2006, the Family Justice Center was established to create a focused, efficient, coordinated, and user friendly system that would improve the delivery of services to victims of domestic/intimate partner violence by:

1. The enhancement of service delivery through co-location and collaboration among 12 on-site domestic violence partnering agencies and 23 off-site providers in order to make available a coordinated community response to all victims of domestic/intimate partner violence.
2. The improvement of victim safety and self-determination and the reduction of further domestic violence through the use of a standardized intake needs assessment, victim safety plans, individual and group counseling, advocacy and referrals and linkages to on-site partner representatives for body mapping and photographic documentation of injuries, police and legal assistance and the opportunity to obtain orders of protection via teleconferencing.
3. The establishment of the Family Justice Center as the community's first point of service for victims of domestic/intimate partner violence, resulting in improved criminal investigations, forensic evidence and case development, enhanced law enforcement and improved information sharing among provider agencies.
4. The promotion of a coordinated community response for domestic violence through public awareness campaigns and enhanced education, prevention and outreach activities.

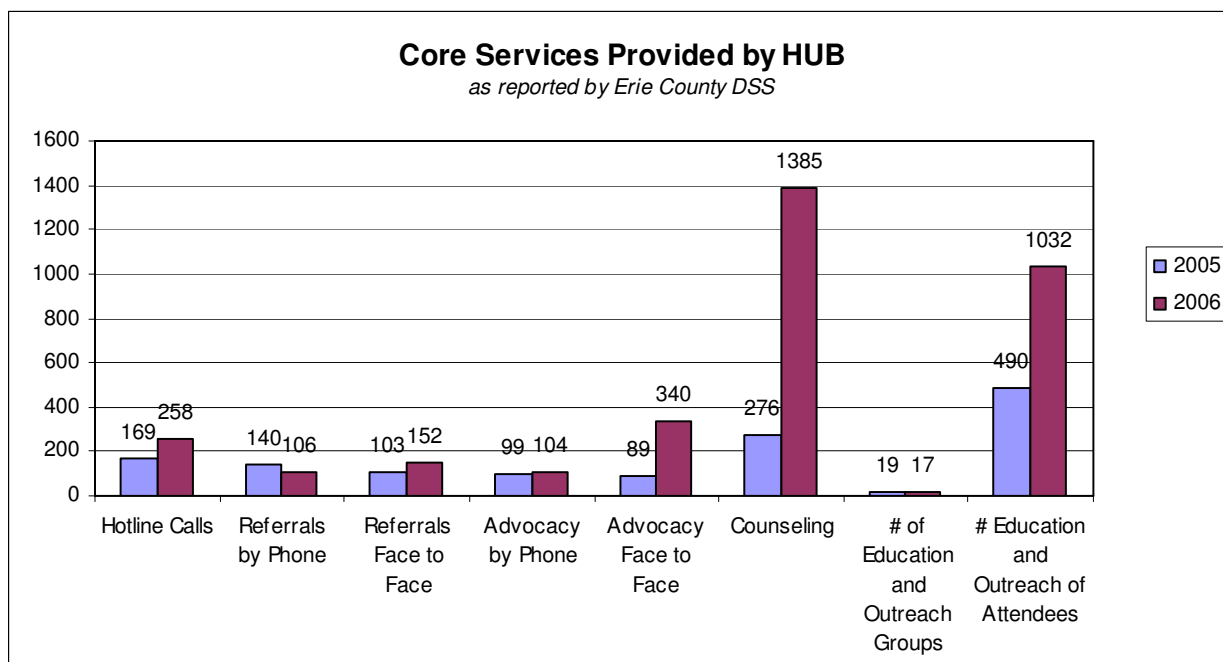
The Family Justice Center of Erie County brings together advocates from non-profit, non-governmental domestic violence service organizations, law enforcement officers, prosecutors, probation officers, forensic medical professionals, civil legal attorneys, chaplains, legal advocates and representatives from community-based organizations into one centralized location.

From March 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 to May 30<sup>th</sup> 2007, the Family Justice Center provided the following services:

Clients Served	924
Returning Clients	362
Forensic Medical Services	155
Safe-Line Telephone Calls	3,534

## Hispanics United of Buffalo

Hispanics United of Buffalo is a multi-service human service organization created through the merging of three Hispanic organizations in 1986. It became a 501(c)(3) in 1989 and provides services for domestic violence victims (court advocacy, non-clinical counseling and case management); HIV/AIDS education (risk reduction and referrals to both mental health and substance abuse counseling); youth services (job readiness training, employment attainment, and court advocacy); housing services (assistance with apartment location and emergency funds); family preservation (comprehensive family support services and senior services).



### Other Erie County Services and Information

Two important programs in Erie County that do not fall into the Residential and Non-Residential service categories are the Erie County Department of Social Services and the Erie County District Attorneys office Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault Bureau. Both of these programs will be highlighted in this section of the profile.

### Erie County Department of Social Services

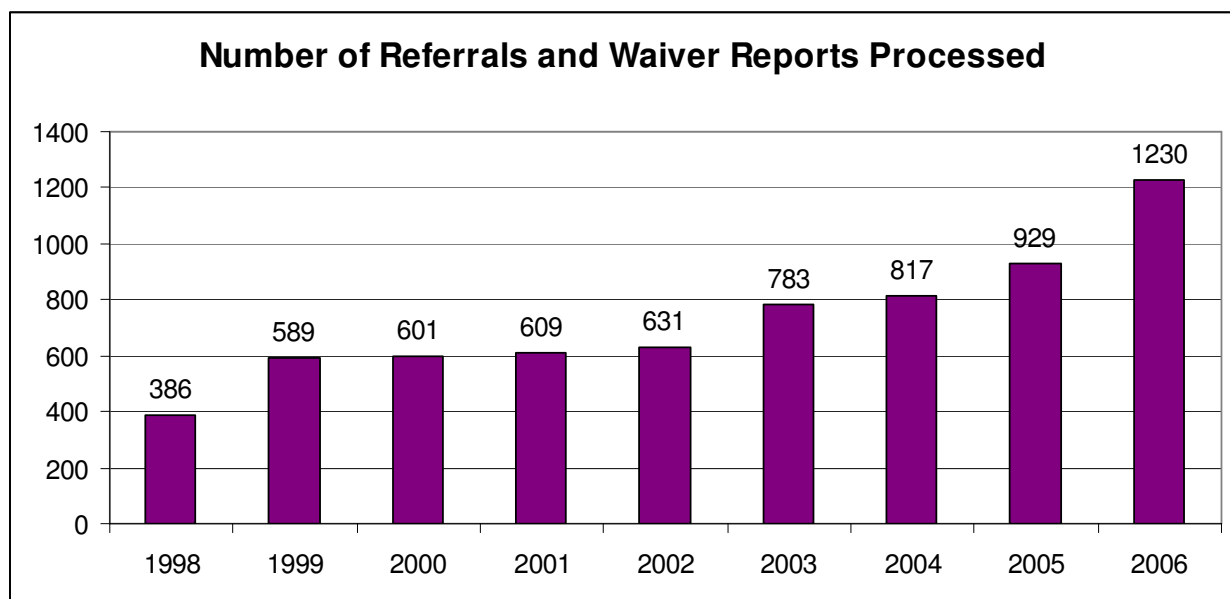
Beyond these OCFS-Approved service providers, the Erie County Department of Social Services also provides domestic violence services to individuals and their families. During the welfare reform movement of the 1990s, Senators Wellstone and Murray heeded concerns of feminists and advocates for battered women by introducing legislation granting each state the option of excusing victims of domestic violence from the new federal regulations. Known as the *Wellstone-Murray Family Violence Option*,

New York chose to implement this legislation on April 1, 1998 into *Social Services Law 349-a*.

Each local Social Services district throughout the state must have at least one specially trained “Domestic Violence Liaison.” These liaisons assess claims of domestic violence made by welfare applicants to determine credibility, service needs, and if, and to what extent, the individuals’ safety would be jeopardized by fulfilling welfare reform requirements.

The Domestic Violence Liaison Unit has the authority to delay victims’ participation with paternity establishment, child support, spousal support, employment activities, alien deeming, minors’ living arrangements, teen-parent education, substance abuse assessment and treatment, and other welfare to work requirements. Waivers from these activities are at least 4 months in duration, and can be extended, if necessary, following a reassessment of the recipient’s situation.

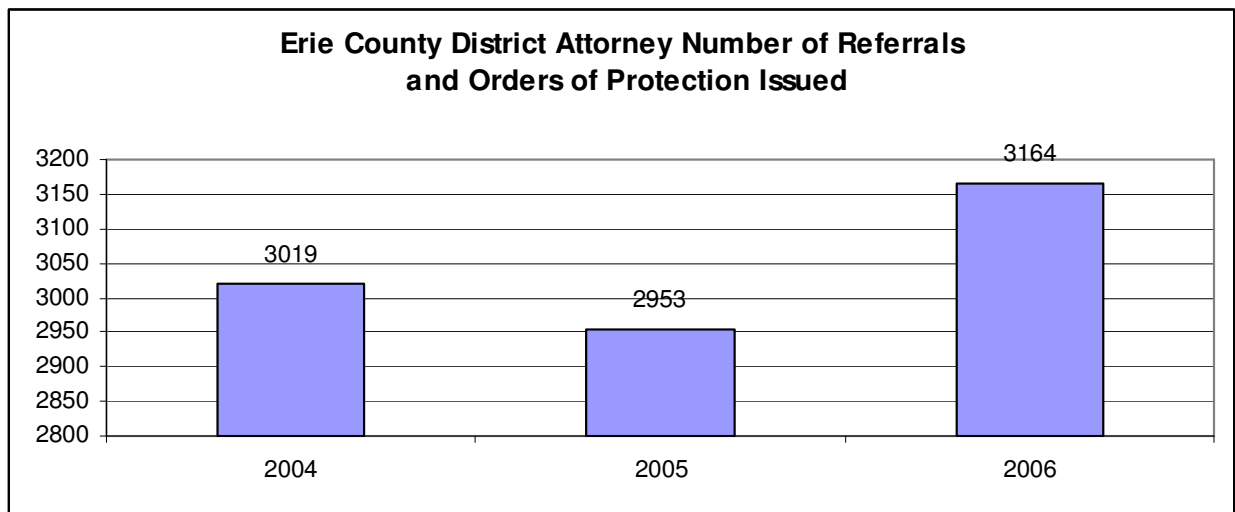
All applicants are screened for the presence of domestic violence while applying for temporary assistance benefits on a completely voluntary basis. Their involvement with the Domestic Violence Unit is also voluntary.



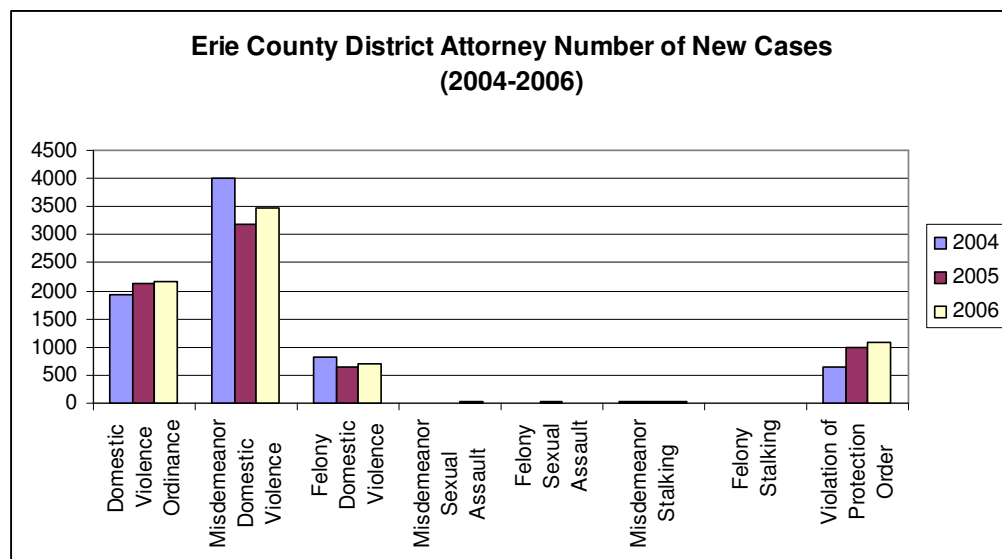
During the past nine years, there has been an increase of greater than 300% in the number referrals to and waiver reports processed by the Erie County Department of Social Services Domestic Violence Unit. This increase does not likely suggest an increase of domestic violence incidents but rather an improvement in screening and referring practices.

## Erie County District Attorney's Office

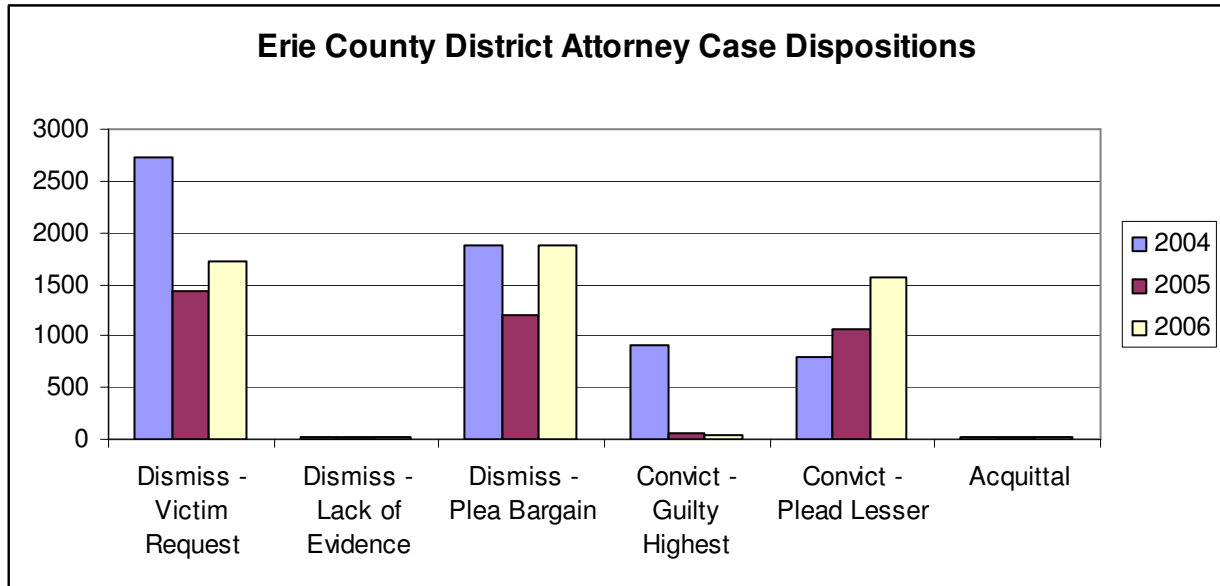
The Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault Bureau (DVSA) of the Erie County District Attorney's Office investigates and prosecutes crimes involving sexual conduct and/or physical violence, including rape, sex abuse, child molestation and intra-familial assault. Prosecutors are on twenty-four hour call to participate in the police investigation from inception of a case. Staff members also speak with community groups and schools to increase public awareness of the unit and enhance reporting of these crimes. The DVSA Bureau also has qualified victim assistance personnel who help victims through the prosecution of their case, provide support for the victim and family and initiate victim services.



The table below provides a snapshot of the various charges linked to new Erie County District Attorney cases. The majority of Erie County cases include Misdemeanor Domestic Violence or violations of Domestic Violence Ordinance or Order of Protection.



Finally, the chart below describes the disposition of charges for 2004, 2005, 2006. The chart reveals that the majority of cases are plead down to a dismissal or a lower level conviction. Importantly, victim requested dismissals have been reduced over the three year period.



*New York Division of Criminal Justice Services - Erie County*

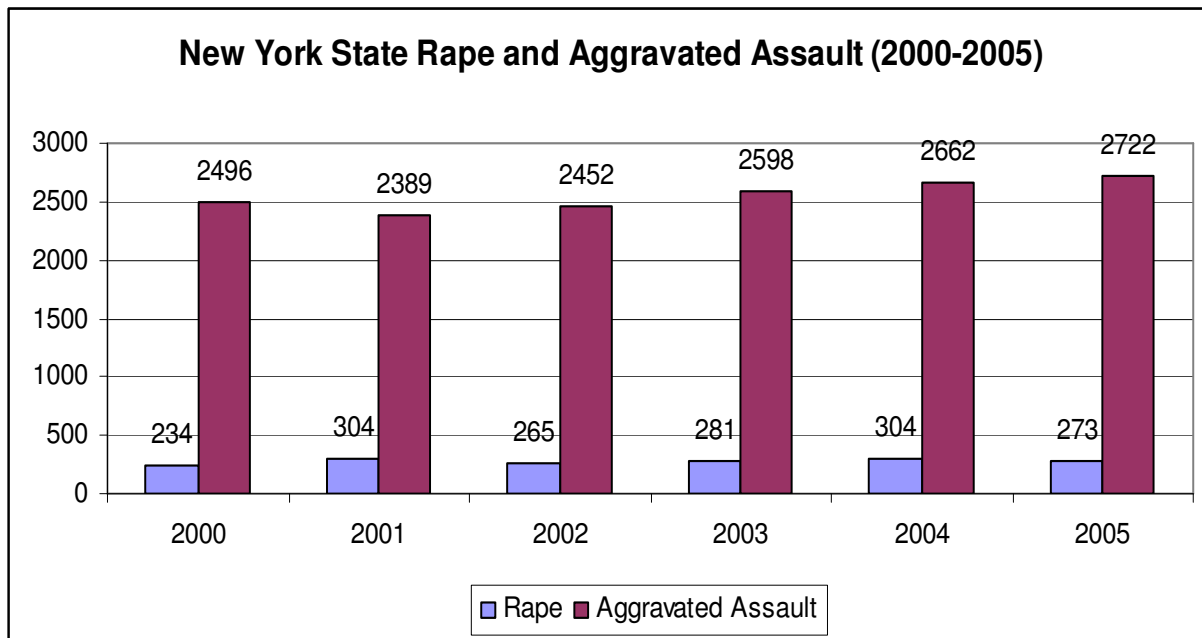
The New York Division of Criminal Justice Services reported the following information for Erie County for 1997 and 2000.

	1997*	2000	1997*	2000
Domestic Violence Reporting Practices – Counts	County Incidence Rate Per 10,000		Criminal Incidence Per 10,000	
	106	95	84	74
Domestic Violence Reporting Practices -Percents	Proportion of Incidents Involving a Crime		% Population Covered by Reporting Police Departments	
	.80	.78	92%	97%
	<b>1997</b>		<b>2000</b>	
Domestic Violence Charging Practices - Percent Reporting Injury When Serious Physical Attack	%	#	%	#
	65%	2175	57%	1637
Domestic Violence Charging Practices - Percent Charging Misdemeanor or Felony When Serious Physical Attack	%	#	%	#
	66%	2175	55%	1637

Domestic Violence Arrest Practices for Offender On-Scene Cases - Percent Reporting Arrest Given Serious Physical Attack	%	#	%	#
	70%	1033	57%	904
Domestic Violence Arrest Practices for Offender On-Scene Cases, by County Percent Reporting Arrest Given Injury	%	#	%	#
	71%	1194	66%	817
Domestic Violence Arrest Practices for Offender On-Scene Cases -Percent Reporting Arrest Given Misdemeanor/Felony	%	#	%	#
	83%	1473	79%	1027

The data suggests mild declines in the number of domestic violence cases reported to the police between 1997 and 2000 as suggested nationally and across New York State.

Other data from the NY Division of Criminal Justice Services suggests increases in the number of aggravated assault arrests from 2000 to 2005.



## *Erie County Fatality Study*

There were 58 intimate-partner homicides reported in Erie County, New York, from 1990 to 2003.

Funded in part by a Violence Against Woman Act Grant entitled "Buffalo and Erie County Stopping Abuse in the Family Environment (BE-SAFE) Project" and the Baldy Center for Law and Social Policy, the Erie County District Attorney Office embarked to explore county intimate homicides to aid in the prevention of homicide, suicide, and domestic violence by informing administrative rulings regarding government interaction with domestic violence perpetrators and victims.

The interdisciplinary research team collected the data between 2005 and 2006. The first step was an interview with the County's Chief District Attorney of the Homicide Bureau Chief. He identified intimate-partner homicides through a review of case files and his personal notes (Personal Communication, 2005). Researchers used information from the interview to search LexisNexis and Westlaw for case-related newspaper articles published in the local newspaper. Search terms included the victim's name, the defendant's name, and a date restriction to exclude results published prior to 1940. Each search returned multiple newspaper articles relating to each homicide, and researchers created a file of articles for each case.

Victim ages ranged between 16 and 94 years, with a mean age of 35. Forty-four (76%) of 58 victims were female. Offender ages ranged between 17 and 75 years, with a mean age of 37. Forty-three (74%) offenders were male. Victim marital status was only explicitly identified in newspaper reports for twenty (34.5%) of the fifty-eight cases.

Where marital status was clearly stated, fifteen (75%) of the victims were married, three (15%) were single, one (5%) was separated, and one (5%) was divorced. Offender marital status was only explicitly identified in newspaper reports for fifteen (25.9%) of the fifty-eight cases. Where marital status was clearly stated, thirteen (86.7%) of the offenders were married, one (6.7%) was single, and one (6.7%) was separated. However, "married" does not mean to imply they were married to each other. In fact, the vast majority of the cases did not involved married individuals. However, the majority of the victims recognized their killers prior to the day of the homicide -- 57 (98.3%) of the 58 cases. Only one homicide took place during an initial encounter between intimate partners. Furthermore, just one of the remaining 57 cases involved a short-term relationship (e.g., a few days or weeks). Victims and defendants were married to each other in 15 (25.9%) of the 58 cases.

Of those 15 victims, nine (60%) lived with the defendant at the time of the homicide. Forty (69%) victims were in a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship with the defendant at some time before the homicide. Seventeen of those 40 victims (42.5%) lived with the defendant at the time of the homicide. Only two (3.4%) of the 58 cases involved same-sex couples. Seventy-five percent of the homicides occurred in the city while 11% occurred nearby the city limits.

## Concluding Thoughts

The scope of domestic violence extends beyond the reach of the criminal justice and human service systems. Thus, in order to truly address the issue, it is essential that communities promote a multi-disciplinary strategy to address the problem.

As this data collection clearly illustrates, there are many groups and organizations that work to meet the needs of domestic violence victims on a regular basis. Each of these groups must provide up-to-date statistics on the number of people they serve and various other dispositions to the general public and to their funding sources. Nevertheless, the collection of data on victims of domestic violence and their families served to be extremely challenging.

It was often the case that information from a given year was incomplete or unavailable. Despite several follow-up attempts it was sometimes impossible to obtain data from an organization or group. In some cases, the definitions used in collecting the data were confusing or unavailable. As a result, it was difficult to gain a clear understanding of the data collected. The result is a patchwork of data on the issue of domestic violence in Buffalo and Erie County. What is missing is a clear understanding of the number of individuals who experience domestic violence and a sense of the outcomes achieved through these varied community resources.

It is important to develop strategies to improve the quality of data collection for the future. One approach would include the development of key community indicators and agreement on the collection of data on these indicators from local organizations. This strategy is closely linked with the concept of a coordinated community response.

A Coordinated Community Response is generally described as a collaboration of county agencies and departments, as well as organizations from the non-profit and private sectors that identify, document, assess, and respond to domestic violence.

Organizations involved with coordinated community response seek to:

- identify mechanisms for referral and follow up, and develop linkages within and across systems, where appropriate;
- establish plans for staff training and skills development;
- establish plans for supervision and internal accountability measures;
- provide measures for responding to domestic incidents should they occur in or affect the workplace, and establish supervisory responsibilities when employees are identified as victims or perpetrators of domestic abuse;
- establish mechanisms for evaluation and periodic public reporting;
- enhance victim safety while promoting victim's right to self-determination; and

- hold abusers accountable for their behavior by imposing appropriate consequences

In order to achieve the goal of ending domestic violence in Buffalo and Erie County, it is absolutely essential that the community develop a better sense of the issue in order to measure performance and hold various players accountable. As we continue to address the issue of domestic violence, in its varied and often complicated manifestations, ECCAFV is hopeful that the data collected will be informative and useful. ECCAFV also hopes to improve future data collections through greater collaboration.

## Appendix

### Description of Services

1. Telephone hotline assistance means providing immediate crisis intervention counseling and information and referral services to victims of domestic violence through a telephone hotline.
2. Information and referral services means
  - providing information about, and referral to, other community services and programs (either through face-to-face contact or through telephone contact)
  - providing perpetrators and alleged perpetrators of domestic violence, upon request, with information and referral to community services and programs which meet the individual needs of such perpetrators (either through face-to-face contact or through telephone contact)
  - maintaining and making accessible a list of community services and programs, which it is reasonable to expect, may be required by victims of domestic violence, their minor children, and other family or household members.
3. Advocacy means providing liaison services or active intervention with community services and programs on behalf of victims of domestic violence. Such services are generally performed face-to-face, and must include, as appropriate
  - assistance in accessing legal remedies and protections and law enforcement personnel
  - obtaining medical care, social services, employment and housing, and obtaining and submitting public assistance applications
4. Counseling means providing individual and/or group counseling to victims of domestic victim. The counseling seeks to:
  - address the needs identified by the victim
  - assist the victims to seek services on their own behalves
  - inform the victims of the options available to ensure their safety and the safety of their children
  - inform the victims of the legal, financial, and housing options available to them
  - assist the victim to improve their problem solving skills
5. Community education/outreach activities means providing educational activities to the community regarding the
  - need for, and benefits of, domestic violence services
  - dynamics of domestic violence
  - the prevention of domestic violence by making presentations, distributing written materials, and using the media.

A segment of the community education/outreach activities focuses on informing the personnel of schools, police agencies, courts, hospitals, and social services districts about the availability of the program's services. It also focuses on informing victims of domestic violence, including underserved populations, about existing services for such victims.

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*The ECCAFV is a member-driven organization which engages in social change activism to dismantle the root causes of domestic violence at the individual, organizational, and institutional level. Our goal is to end domestic violence.*

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