

# **Bannock County Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Task Force Safety and Accountability Audit**

## **Executive Summary**

**October 2012**

**130 N. 6<sup>th</sup> Ave**

**Pocatello, ID 83201**

**234-7421**

This project was supported by Grant 2010-WE-AX-0052 from by the Office of Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Justice

# **Bannock County Domestic Violence First Responders Safety and Accountability Audit-Executive Summary**

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## ***Introduction***

Between January 2012 and October 2012, the Bannock County Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Task Force conducted a Safety and Accountability Audit (Safety Audit) on the coordinated community efforts of first responders in domestic violence cases, involving: strangulation, stalking and sexual assault. Building on our longstanding commitment to addressing domestic violence as an issue of community safety, the Safety Audit team included representation from the courts, police, dispatch, advocacy, and batterer intervention.

The Domestic Violence Safety and Accountability Audit (Safety Audit) refers to a process developed by Ellen Pence, Ph.D, and Praxis International.<sup>1</sup> The Safety Audit is a systematic observation and analysis of work routines and documents used in agencies that process domestic violence cases. The Safety Audit studies how work and workers alike are organized to think and act on cases involving domestic violence. It seeks to identify the gap between what people experience and need and what institutions provide. Focus Groups with victims provide a window into the gap from a victim's position and interviews, observations, and case file analysis help to determine how it is produced by case management practices. The hope of the Safety Audit is that by recognizing how a problem is produced by institutional practices, we can also uncover solutions to rectify it. Recommendations are made regarding new standardizing practices, such as new rules, policies, procedures, forms, and training. For a more detailed methodology of the Safety Audit please see appendix B.

The Bannock County Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Task Force chose to focus on the initial criminal legal system response to domestic violence cases, including dispatch, police and advocates, to develop a better understanding of how our coordinated community response to domestic violence best serves victim safety and batterer accountability. Participating agencies in this Safety Audit include the: Bannock County Sheriff Department, Chubbuck Police Department, Pocatello Police Department and Family Services Alliance. The Safety Audit team would like to acknowledge that it is a brave act for the participating agencies to share their existing practices and be open to study and feedback. We recognize the hard work 911 dispatch, law enforcement and advocacy agencies contribute to the field of domestic violence. Although hard work and commitment do contribute to victim safety and batterer accountability, the complexities of victim risk coupled with the fact that intervening agencies were not designed to take into account the distinctive characteristics of battering results in gaps between what is needed to ensure safety for victims and the response in any community. It is the hope that with

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<sup>1</sup> Praxis International provided technical assistance to the Safety Audit team as it planned and conducted its work. For additional information on the Safety Audit methodology, go to [www.praxisinternational.org](http://www.praxisinternational.org).

the recommendations made through this Safety Audit, we can close some of the gaps recognized within our community.

### ***Recognizing Community Response***

The Safety Audit is designed to identify practices that impede safety and accountability within Bannock County. While the focus is on discovering and articulating problems, ultimately its effectiveness requires follow up and change from the participating agencies. In Bannock County, the foundation for change includes the following elements:

- The existence of the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Task Force, and willingness of community stake holders to be active in the Task Force mission. This includes participation from each respective agency, as well as prosecution, treatment providers, advocates, and court personnel.
- Willingness by the community and key stakeholders to critically examine the coordinated community approach and practices, as illustrated by the Safety Audit.
- Dedication to innovation and change where community response does not meet community goals of safety and accountability.
- Commitment to continued understanding of the relational dynamics of domestic violence related cases and goals of increased community awareness.
- An emphasis on increasing community response to domestic violence, strangulation, stalking and sexual assault by our community first responders.

In recognizing community response it is essential to acknowledge that the Safety Audit would not have been possible without the brave individuals who participated in the Safety Audit focus groups in order to help us better understand the experience of first responder's interventions on behalf of the victims and their children. The focus groups brought to light victims' experiences that have taken place in the community and helped the Safety Audit team to better understand how victims of domestic violence and sexual assault experience initial criminal legal system intervention and whether that intervention enhances or diminishes their safety. A victim's first contact with the system can play an integral role in whether or not he or she perceives the ongoing judicial process as helpful. The focus groups also brought to light inconsistencies in the policies and practices of participating agencies. The focus groups identified gaps in community first response to domestic violence, sexual assault, strangulation and stalking and those differences will be highlighted throughout the report. The focus groups also addressed how helpful it was when victims encountered a relationship of trust and engagement with those intervening in their lives. They provided specific examples of supportive responses that contributed to their safety and well-being.

### ***Audit question, scope, and data collection***

The Bannock County Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Task Force chose to examine the question:

*How do the efforts of our community first responders (911 dispatch, police and advocates) best serve victim safety and batterer accountability?*

The team decided to narrow the focus of the Safety Audit to include Bannock County Sheriff's Department and Dispatch, Chubbuck Police Department and Dispatch, Pocatello Police Department and Dispatch and Family Services Alliance. The audit findings are based on information gathered during the following activities:

- 3 rounds of mapping case processing at the points of initial emergency calls, police intervention and arrest (completed during team meetings, with contributions from dispatch, law enforcement, advocates and other team members)
- 1 focus group with victims who have experienced reporting domestic violence and sexual assault.
- Individual interviews related to the function of police officers, dispatch, advocates and supervisors.
- Approximately 16 observations of case processing by police, dispatch and advocacy.
- Audio and text analysis of 28 cases of domestic violence.

### ***Discovering Gaps***

This report presents the overarching gaps related to victims' safety discovered by the Safety Audit. Individual agencies also received a direct briefing by the coordinator and one or more team members to review gaps in practice and recommended changes specific to that agency

### **Overarching Gaps**

1. In the first response to domestic violence, there is inconsistent recognition of the range and scope of domestic violence, including strangulation, sexual assault and stalking.
2. Dispatch information-gathering related to the safety of the responding officers, victims and others at the scene is often incomplete.
3. Thoroughness of information-gathering and investigations in domestic violence-related cases is inconsistent across law enforcement personnel and jurisdictions.
4. Law enforcement dispatchers and patrol officers are unprepared to recognize and respond to sexual assault in intimate partner relationships; sexual assault is largely invisible.
5. The link to immediate and sustained advocacy for victims is inconsistent.

### ***Setting the Stage for Implementation***

In the team's analysis of the first response to domestic violence, it paid particular attention to the ways in which the response is organized and coordinated within and across agencies. These Audit Trails<sup>2</sup>, in turn, pointed the way to the kinds of changes reflected in the recommendations. Some changes are relatively small in nature or quick, such as changing information in a

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<sup>2</sup> "Audit Trails" reflect the primary ways in which institutions organize work. They include: (1) mission, purpose, and function; (2) concepts and theories; (3) rules and regulations; (4) administrative practices; (5) resources; (6) education and training; (7) linkages; and (8) accountability. See Methodology, Appendix B.

brochure, while others are more involved in the degree to which policy, administrative procedures, assumptions about domestic violence, attention to accountability, and other factors must be addressed.

The Safety Audit team recommends the agencies involved in the Safety Audit meet with the Safety Audit team to discuss how each agency should follow through with recommendations made in the Safety Audit. The Safety Audit team has committed to being a consultation resource for the agencies involved in the Safety Audit. The Safety Audit team will continue to hold meetings regarding the visibility of changes made as well as establish how changes made impact victim/survivor feedback regarding initial criminal justice intervention. The Safety Audit team can link resources to recommendations for changes, for example, the recommendations made for Dispatch in Gap 2 do not have to start from scratch, but rather can build upon 30 years of work in the field by referencing the Best Practice Assessment Tools for 911 and Blueprint for Safety material.<sup>3</sup>

### *Change Chart for General Findings*

#### **Key Findings from the Bannock County Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Task Force Safety & Accountability Audit**

<i>A strong foundation: How do the efforts of our community first responders (911 dispatch, police and advocates) best serve victim safety and batterer accountability?</i>								
<i>Who will be involved in closing these gaps?</i> Dispatch, law enforcement, supervisors, advocates.								
<i>Gaps and recommendations</i>	Mission, purpose, & function	Concepts and theories	Rules & regulations	Administrative Practices	Resources	Education & training	Linkages	Accountability
	<i>What kind of change might close this gap?</i>							
<b>1) Gap 1: Inconsistent recognition of the range and scope of domestic violence, including sexual assault and stalking:</b> Recommendations: Standard reporting format Explaining “next step” information to victims Adoption of Ten33 program All agencies learn and utilize the same definition of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking.				√	√	√		√
<b>2) Gap 2 Dispatch information-gathering related to the safety of responding officers, victims, and others at the scene is often incomplete</b> Recommendations: Utilize procedure so that dispatch must ask questions necessary to victim and officer safety.		√		√		√	√	√

<sup>3</sup> Best Assessment Practices for 911 can be found at <http://www.praxisinternational.org/files/praxis/files/Safety%20Audits/TTABestPracticeChecklist911Mar2012.pdf>  
 The Blueprint for Safety can be found at <http://www.blueprintforsafety.org/>

*A strong foundation: How do the efforts of our community first responders (911 dispatch, police and advocates) best serve victim safety and batterer accountability?*

*Who will be involved in closing these gaps?* Dispatch, law enforcement, supervisors, advocates.

<i>Gaps and recommendations</i>	Mission, purpose, & function	Concepts and theories	Rules & regulations	Administrative Practices	Resources	Education & training	Linkages	Accountability
	<i>What kind of change might close this gap?</i>							
<p><b>3) Gap 3 Thoroughness of information-gathering and investigations in domestic violence-related cases is inconsistent across law enforcement personnel and jurisdictions.</b>            Recommendations: Standard reporting format            Explaining “next step” information to victims            Adoption of Ten33 program</p>		√		√	√	√	√	√
<p><b>4) Gap 4 Law enforcement dispatchers and patrol officers are unprepared to recognize and respond to sexual assault in intimate partner relationships; sexual assault is largely invisible.</b>            Recommendations: Training on the definition of sexual assault.            Policies for first responders to sexual assault.</p>				√		√	√	
<p><b>5) Link to immediate and sustained advocacy for victims is inconsistent</b>  <b>Recommendations:</b> Reinforce existing policy through accountability of supervisors when an advocate is not called to the scene.            Train dispatch and officers to better recognize domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking.</p>				√	√	√	√	√

**See complete report for a detailed discussion of these and other findings.**

It is the hope of the Safety Audit team to take what insights have been gained from this step in the process and inspire further discussion, as well as recommendations conducting Safety Audits at continued steps in the process. It is worth noting that changes made are worth paying attention to as some changes might inadvertently produce unintended, harmful consequences or disparate impacts on victims and offenders.

For a more comprehensive understanding of the Safety Audit results, a complete Safety Audit Report and members involved in conducting the Safety Audit, please contact Danika Chapple, Safety Audit Coordinator at 208-236-7421.