

## Safety Subcommittee

### “S.A.F.E”

## Final Recommendations & Report

### I. Challenge

Through discussion as a committee and further research of experts in the community, it was determined that violence against women and girls, including sexual assault, date rape, domestic violence and other gender based incidents has increased so dramatically that law enforcement and special services, such as Women Helping Women, cannot meet the demand.

Our committee sees this trend of gender-based violence to be unacceptable. Violence against girls and their mothers leaves lasting, lifelong scars. Our research and community discussions centered around changing the narrative by intervening early in life with the male population. Teaching men “healthy masculinity” from an early age can circumvent the trend toward violence against women later in life.

Additionally, providing an online platform for all safety-related resources, segmented by age of potential victims, will aid those already in a violent situation.

### II. Community Input

We conducted extensive primary and secondary research, including interviewing more than a dozen community experts (full list below) and conducting a feedback survey of community members. Common themes across our research included:

1. Demand for services is at an all-time high
2. Focus on prevention - the subcommittee’s primary focus should be prevention (vs. intervention), especially with younger men who need more education and role models for “healthy masculinity.” To prioritize prevention efforts, it was suggested to focus on young men and women who have had adverse childhood experiences (ACES) and who are in our most marginalized populations. “Whole family” solutions also work well.
3. If the county also wants to address intervention, it should focus on:
  - a) “Stricter consequences for abusers,” “stop releasing children to violent parents,” and “honoring restraining orders”
  - b) Educating judges and law enforcement about intimate partner violence
  - c) Providing more jail space for offenders
  - d) Expanding the DVERT program
  - e) Ensuring we maintain sufficient rape kit testing resources

## **Full Research Findings**

### Introduction

The Subcommittee on the Safety of Women and Girls conducted research and interviews with representatives from organizations in Hamilton County for insight into the causes, scope and nature of violence against women and girls in Hamilton County. The root cause of gender-based violence is a gender-power imbalance perpetuated in all levels of society (L. Michau, J. Horn, A. Bank, M. Dutt, C. Zimmerman. 2015).

### Interviews

Our group identified Women Helping Women as a stakeholder and fundamental partner for our recommendations. Women Helping Women (WHW) focuses on crisis intervention and prevention advocacy on three areas of gender-based violence: sexual assault, domestic violence, and stalking. Kristin Shrimplin, President and CEO of WHW, emphasized the need to “significantly” and “systemically” invest money and policy toward prevention, especially given the rising demand for intervention. According to their 2017 annual report, their sexual assault responses rose 40 percent and therapy services more than doubled. They served nearly 11,300 clients including nearly 6,000 survivors. Shrimplin said that they are constantly looking for revenue: “Donor dollars and grant dollars aren’t necessarily [enough].” She said that although intervention seems like the more urgent need to donors and policymakers, “we will always be putting out fires when there is severe disparity of prevention dollars compared to intervention dollars.” Shrimplin estimated this disparity at almost one million for intervention and \$150,000 for prevention.

Shrimplin specifically recommended more funding for WHW’s school education program on dating violence and sexual violence “to empower more middle school and high school youth.” WHW is the primary source of gender-based violence education in the region by serving 4,358 students in 30 schools through their Prevent and Empower Program.

Representatives from the YWCA identified needs in criminal justice system reform, education, and trauma-informed care standards for all victims, especially children who are likely to perpetuate the cycle of violence. Advocacy Manager Desiré Bennett suggested Intimate Partner Violence Judicial Training for judges to understand the victim’s point of view and a partnership with the Ohio Justice & Policy Center’s Justice for Incarcerated Battered Women’s Project, which aims to get women clemency and parole. Bennett also recommended a focus on girls and women of color and lower income families. Erica Yingling, director of Domestic Violence Non-Residential Services and Detective Stephanie Bellamah of the Cincinnati Police Department both emphasized finding ways to break the cycle of violence through education, empowerment, and systemic reforms. Bellamah stated that the lack of space in jail and

lack of probation consequences continue the cycle of violence and discourage victims. Both Bellamah and Shrimplin identified the Domestic Violence Enhancement Response Team as an excellent program that connects the network of organizations protecting women.

Janice Clay from Bethany House and Kimberly Freeman, a Counselor in the Great Oaks School District, similarly emphasized lack of housing as a barrier to female employment and empowerment. Freeman answered that the single most important thing that can be done to prevent violence against women is to empower women with resources so that they can feel supported without a man.

Our subcommittee also interviewed the Honorable Heather Russell, Hamilton County Municipal Court Judge, who similarly pointed to influences in youth as a factor, asserting that a lack of a family unit and role models at home and at school as a primary factor for gender based violence. At CHANGE court, a rehabilitation program for victims of sex trafficking, Russell said that all the victims she sees have “a history of abuse or an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE), such as family poverty or homelessness that began at a very young age.” Russell said that women who grow up where abuse is common may develop a low self-esteem and victim mindset, which often leaves them vulnerable to further victimization. Russell says that when a child repeatedly witnesses domestic violence, he or she may learn to repeat the behavior as a batterer or victim. Russell said that “unchecked mental illness” in a child is also a risk factor, especially when the child has no responsible adult to advocate for them.

Russell recommended addressing Hamilton County's lack of jail space by aiming to incarcerate violent offenders, even for a short time, to deter violent crime. She also recommended that more treatment facilities could help violent offenders change their behavior.

Russell said that our response to gender-based violence requires “no tax dollars,” rather for more people to take advantage of the existing network of resources. Heather Russell says she would like to see foster families, “big brother groups,” and nuclear families act as healthy role models and mentor “at-risk children” in school and/or at home. Russell's emphasis on the family unit shifted our focus to a holistic response that strives to include family, teachers, and all community members.

### **Research Survey**

Our Feedback Survey received 18 responses from people who attended our presentation in July. All agreed that prevention should be our primary focus over intervention.

When asked “If Hamilton County had enough funds to support this project, what do you believe the funds should be used for?” the most common answer was more education

and outreach. Some specified outreach to high schools, and education around “healthy relationships” and “sexual harassment.” One response specified a program that targets boys and two more specified young women. One response offered something new: to consider local hospitals as a starting point as another option to provide education and programming. As a response to a question about who to look to as leaders in Hamilton County, the most common answers were Women Helping Women, Denise Driehaus, female police officers, and other women focused groups such as the YMCA and Girl Scouts.

When asked what legislation Hamilton County should pass to support this project, 12 people responded. The most common answer was to enforce stricter consequences for abusers, stop releasing children to violent parents, and to honor restraining orders. On the other end, one response proposed to decriminalize sex work. One response proposed constructing more lighting on streets, sidewalks, rapid response for domestic violence in a way that is victim-centered, training for courts about victim-centered processes. One response proposed a focus on women's health and another questioned the way we question/interact with survivors from a legal standpoint.

When asked about expanding WHW's “Healthy Masculinity Curriculum,” 15 of 16 responses resounded approval. We received suggestions to also focus on standards for masculinity within racial groups, have the program taught by men and women, and to ask if the Boy Scouts have a similar curriculum.

### **Primary Research Interviews:**

Kristin Shrimplin, President, Women Helping Women of SW Ohio  
Desiré Bennett, Advocacy Manager, YWCA  
Erika Yingling, Director- Domestic Violence Non-residential Services, YWCA  
Detective Stephanie Bellamah, Domestic Violence Investigator, Cincinnati Police Department  
Dr. Lakshmi Sammarco, Hamilton County Coroner  
Kimberly Freeman, Diamond Oaks  
Honorable Heather Russell, Hamilton County Municipal Court Judge  
Janice Clay, Bethany House  
Diamond Oaks Womankind Student Group

## Secondary Research Resources:

- [Jewish Family Services, Domestic Violence Prevention Education and Support](#)
- [Ohio Domestic Violence Network](#)
- [YWCA, Family Violence Prevention](#)
- [Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence](#)
- L. Michau, J. Horn, A. Bank, M. Dutt, C. Zimmerman. 2015. "Prevention of violence against women and girls: lessons from practice."  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140673614617979?via%3DiHub>
- Ohio Department of Education
- [https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine\\_burke\\_harris\\_how\\_childhood\\_trauma\\_affects\\_health\\_across\\_a\\_lifetime](https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_lifetime)
- <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/oprah-winfrey-treating-childhood-trauma/>
- <https://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/service/m/mayerson-center/about>
- <https://www.wcpo.com/news/local-news/hamilton-county/cincinnati/new-program-changing-how-cincinnati-police-respond-to-calls-of-domestic-violence>
- <http://www.health-genderviolence.org/guidance-for-health-care-professionals-in-strengthening-health-system-responses-to-gender-based-vi-0>
- <http://wvxu.org/post/hamilton-county-now-has-new-technology-help-domestic-violence-victims#stream/0>
- Women Helping Women
  - [Prevent and Empower](#)
  - [Coaching Boys into Men](#)
    - [Tools](#)
    - [Webinar](#)

### III. **Recommendations**

#### **Recommendation**

1. Hamilton County should devote a standalone portion of the County Website for the Commission on Women & Girls. This will include updates on the work of the Commission, and information about existing programs offered by Hamilton County and area nonprofits. The website will contain women's stories of empowerment. The website will also include informational resources and connections to volunteer opportunities to support women's safety and empowerment.

Based on the responses we received from community member during the July Women and Girls Community Event, the Women and Girls Safety Subcommittee recommends a website/repository of information for those wanting to learn more about women's safety and a "Healthy Masculinity" curriculum for children in Hamilton County. We believe that a website that compiles information about healthy relationships, how to talk to children about relationships, and where to turn to for help and resources is needed in Hamilton County. We hope that this website could be a collaboration between the agencies that currently exist, like Women Helping Women, the YWCA, and Planned Parenthood, among others, to bring together information so that citizens have a place to look to educate themselves and help others. After the website is created, we want to work with local community centers, libraries, and businesses to spread the word about this resource.

#### **Recommendation**

5. Because prevention is essential to increasing safety for women and girls in the long term, area schools and community organizations would benefit by implementing healthy masculinity curricula.
8. In researching prevention programs, the Commission found that there are several curricula available for high schools, but could not find specific healthy masculinity curricula available for younger children. Early intervention is key, and so the Commission should continue to search for health masculinity programs for younger children, and pursue a partnership to develop one if none exist.

We also believe that we need to educate our children, especially boys and young men, about safe relationships. To do so, we recommend creating or adopting a curriculum about "healthy masculinity" throughout the county. The healthy masculinity curriculum is best started at a younger age where it can take root and start to influence the younger generations. This curriculum would teach young men and boys about how to be male leaders and make positive change in society. This would include teaching about being strong without being violent, standing up for the abused, and challenging

stereotypes, especially those associated with being male. Once a curriculum is chosen, we want to partner with county organizations, such as schools, libraries, and recreation centers, to incorporate this curriculum into their course offerings. One strategy is to identify someone within a school that finds this topic to be important for their students and have them take this project under their wing. In order to make Hamilton County safe for all people, including women and girls, we know that we need to provide resources and education to those living here.

Respectfully Submitted,

Safety Subcommittee  
Anne Bangert, Woman Chair  
Camille Williams, Girl Chair  
Eisha Armstrong  
Nancy Aichholz  
Emily Gilbride  
Annah Saladonis