

GRANT ANALYSIS FORM OPERATING & CAPITAL GRANT PROJECTS/PROGRAMS

Department/Division: Milwaukee Health Department, Office of Violence Prevention

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Category of Request

New Grant

Grant Continuation

Previous Council File No. _____

Change in Previously Approved Grant

Previous Council File No. _____

Project/Program Title: Justice for Families

Grantor Agency: U.S. Department of Justice – Office on Violence Against Women

Grant Application Date: 01/21/2016

Anticipated Award Date: 08/31/2016

1. Description of Grant Project/Program (Include Target Locations and Populations):

The Grants to Support Families in the Justice System program (referred to as the Justice for Families Program) was authorized in the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 to improve the response of all aspects of the civil and criminal justice systems to families with a history of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or in cases involving allegations of child sexual abuse. The program supports the following activities for improving the capacity of courts and communities to respond to families affected by the targeted crimes: court-based and court-related programs; supervised visitation and safe exchange by and between parents; training and technical assistance for people who work with families in the court system; civil legal services; and provision of resources in juvenile court matters. Projects supported by the Justice for Families Program are those that focus on keeping victims and their children safe from further abuse and holding offenders accountable.

The Milwaukee Visitation and Exchange Center (MVEC), established with OVW Safe Havens funding, opened in October 2014, filling a void as the first resource for victims in Milwaukee focused on facilitating the safe visitation and exchange of their children. Since opening in October 2014, the MVEC has served a total of 63 families, facilitated 430 exchanges, and supervised 557 visits.

The City of Milwaukee, with its partners Children's Hospital of Wisconsin Community Services, Sojourner Family Peace Center, the First Judicial District, and Legal Action of Wisconsin, Inc., will use this award to support the safety of victims of domestic violence through the provision of safe exchange and visitation services conducted at the Milwaukee Visitation and Exchange Center and assist low-income victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and non-offending parents in their efforts to achieve safety and independence from abuse by providing free civil legal assistance. Specifically, the City of Milwaukee will: 1) continue the project coordinator role at the MVEC; 2) provide supervised visitation and safe exchange services to a minimum of 75 unduplicated families per year in situations involving domestic violence, dating violence, child abuse, sexual assault and stalking; 3) continue to provide domestic abuse advocacy for victims and non-offending parents at the MVEC; 4) ensure that the supervised visitation and exchange services continue to be fully aligned with the Safe Haven's Guiding Principles; 5) update Center policies, procedures and protocols to include the provision of legal advocacy services consistent with OVW's Guiding Principles; 6) conduct an assessment of each victim's or protective parent's legal needs; 7) provide free civil legal assistance to underserved victims aimed at increasing their safety and supporting their efforts to achieve independence from abuse; and 8) provide civil legal assistance to non-offending protective parents who utilize the MVEC. The City of Milwaukee will serve as the fiscal implementing entity for this project.

2. Relationship to City-Wide Strategic Goals and Departmental Objectives:

The Milwaukee Commission on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault is a board under the purview of the City of Milwaukee, charged by ordinance with the responsibility to increase safety for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault and to hold perpetrators accountable and change their behavior. This grant would allow Milwaukee to address critical gaps in the safety net for families affected by violence. Studies show that the risk of violence can be greater for victims of domestic violence and their children after separation from an abusive situation. Safe exchange and visitation centers that operate with a sound understanding of issues of violence, and that collaborate with key community partners, can reduce re-victimization for the children and adult victims. They reduce incidences of children witnessing violence, provide opportunities for parents to learn and practice appropriate parenting, increase safety for children visiting with the offending parent, and reduce children's exposure to violence outside the center. In addition to access to safe exchange and visitation centers, victims of domestic violence and non-offending parents – particularly low-income underserved victims - frequently require civil legal assistance to ensure their own safety and the safety of their children. Access to legal representation, assistance and advocacy to address family matters issues (e.g. civil protection orders, child support, paternity, custody, placement and divorce) as well as civil issues directly related to their history of abuse (e.g. housing, access to health care, public benefit assistance) is a critical and necessary support in helping victims and non-offending parents achieve safety as well as freedom from abuse. This project will address both of these needs by continuing to provide victims with safe exchange and visitation services at the Milwaukee Visitation and Exchange Center (hereafter MVEC) and enhance existing services available at the Center with the addition of civil legal assistance to low-income victims that includes representation, legal advice and advocacy to address family matters and civil matters that are directly related to their abuse.

3. Need for Grant Funds and Impact on Other Departmental Operations (Applies only to Programs):

Milwaukee, WI is a vibrant and richly diverse urban community that is facing a number of significant challenges. The city's poverty rate in 2014 was 29%, nearly double the national rate of 14.8%, making Milwaukee the nation's fifth most impoverished big city. The poverty rate for children was 42.1%; for African Americans it was 39.9%. The city has one of the highest unemployment rates for men of color in the U.S., and the highest rate of incarceration among African American men in the U.S. Milwaukee also has unacceptably high rates of domestic violence. The Sojourner 24/7 domestic abuse hotline receives 2,220 calls per year from victims in crisis. After a recent decline, the rate of homicides in the city skyrocketed from 86 homicides in 2014 to 145 homicides in 2015. 12 of those homicides were domestic abuse related and 8 were intimate partner violence related. The social conditions existing in Milwaukee create an environment where women are often the target of domestic violence, stalking, dating violence

and sexual assault, and where underserved victims of abuse need resources to protect their safety and support their efforts to achieve freedom from abuse. The First Judicial District currently presides over 11,142 divorce family and paternity cases annually. In addition to or in conjunction with these cases, the Family Division conducts approximately 5,400 hearings on petitions where there is an allegation of domestic violence. At these hearings petitioners seek injunctions to stop domestic abuse and child abuse. In about 200 of these 5,400 hearings each year, petitioners also ask the court to hold subsequent hearings focused on requiring the offender to surrender his or her firearms. The Court conservatively estimates that the each of its 5 Family Court Judges oversees 30 cases per year where supervised placement or exchange is needed, for a total of 150 cases per year. Approximately 50% (or 75) of these cases involve risk for domestic violence. The First Judicial District also has 3 judges assigned to the Felony Division who preside exclusively over 3 domestic violence specialty courts. These 3 courts process approximately 680 felony cases involving some form of domestic violence annually.

Wisconsin's STOP VAWA Grant Program provides funding to support domestic violence service providers, sexual assault service providers and specialized regional prosecution projects. It does not fund safe exchange/visitation services or the civil legal services to address family law or other civil matters. The MVEC, established with OVV Safe Havens funding, opened in October 2014, filling a void as the first resource for victims in Milwaukee focused on facilitating the safe visitation and exchange of their children. The MVEC does not duplicate other services because it is the only service in the community available to victims and protective parents.

While we are pleased with the success of the project (detailed below), we are keenly aware that many of the low-income victims of domestic violence who utilize the Center lack access to legal assistance to support them in their efforts to break free from violence. In fact, a recent review of intakes conducted since the MVEC opened revealed that 79% of victims and protective parents did not have an attorney. Legal Action provides civil legal assistance and representation to approximately 700 low-income victims of domestic violence per year in Milwaukee. Despite this, they are forced to turn-away hundreds of domestic violence victims each year who seek a lawyer in a family law matter other than restraining orders because the agency lacks the resources to serve them. In Legal Action's most recent community assessment, 80% of victims of domestic violence reported that they were forced to deal with a civil legal problem without a lawyer. While services are available to assist victims in obtaining a restraining order, there are few resources available to assist them with complex legal issues such as custody, divorce and child support issues. The non-profit Milwaukee Justice Center provides free civil legal services that are limited to brief legal advice and assistance completing forms; they do not provide representation. In 2014 they served 9,884 clients all of whom were pro se or self-represented. Of those, only 1773 received brief legal advice.

4. Results Measurement/Progress Report (Applies only to Programs):
The Coordinator of the Milwaukee Commission on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault will submit reports to the Office on Violence Against women in January and July of each funding year. In addition, the Core Partners on the grant will conduct a safety assessment of Center operations, protocols, and logistics to improve services and identify opportunities for improvement during the first quarter of the grant funding.
5. Grant Period, Timetable and Program Phase-Out Plan:
The grant period for this funding is 36 months from 10/1/2016 – 9/30/2019. Hiring for an attorney for Legal Action will take place during the first quarter of the grant period. The Milwaukee Visitation Center will continue to operate throughout the 36 months of the grant period. Core Partners will work to identify additional funding to maintain Center services beyond the 36 months.
6. Provide a list of Subgrantees:
Sojourner Family Peace Center
Children's Hospital of WI – Community Services
Legal Action of Wisconsin
7. If Possible, complete Grant Budget Form and attach to back.
See attached.