

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Family Justice Center Overview

Background/Need

- Victims of interpersonal violence and child witnesses of interpersonal violence are forced to navigate multiple, complex systems in order to access services.
- Children and adults alike may be required to tell their story multiple times – each time exposing them to renewed trauma; or they may be forced to miss multiple days of school or work as they meet with different service providers throughout the city.
- For many, the effort to receive services may be too overwhelming or burdensome, leading them to lose hope and, too often, return to an abusive home.
- Victims are best served when public and private sector agencies enter into deep, meaningful collaboration, housing themselves in a single Family Justice Center or similar multi-agency location, sharing information to better coordinate care, and ensuring the system works effectively for those in need.

What is a Family Justice Center?

- The Family Justice Center is a victim-centered, trauma-informed model in which multiple domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse partners are co-located and work in collaboration with each other so that victims and their children access all of the services that they need in a single place--police officers, sheriff's deputies, prosecutors, advocates, counselors, representatives of the faith community, medical professionals, and others under one roof.
- The first Family Justice Center was founded in San Diego in 2002. Due to its success the model has been replicated over 120 times internationally.
- Documented outcomes of Family Justice Centers include significantly reduced domestic violence-related homicides, increased victim safety, helping to break the cycle of violence for children, increased efficiency in collaborative services to victims among service providers, and increased prosecution of offenders.
- There are three Family Justice Centers in North Carolina in Buncombe, Forsythe, and Guilford Counties.

What is the Alliance for Hope?

- The Family Justice Center Steering Committee has contracted for two sessions with The Alliance for Hope, an international organization that provides training and technical assistance to communities as they develop family justice centers. Their first session was to conduct a planning study in May 2018 and the second session is to facilitate the strategic visioning workshop in September 2018.

Why is Charlotte-Mecklenburg Considering a Family Justice Center Now?

- Charlotte-Mecklenburg has a long history of strong services for victims of abuse but we also recognize that historically this work to end violence and intersecting oppressions is still young and ever evolving. We are always striving to critically examine our work, look for best/promising practices in other geographic areas and implement changes to better support abuse victims in our community.
- In Charlotte-Mecklenburg we have a strong foundation of collaboration, committed funding and the tireless work and dedication of the many individuals that have been working with domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse victims in our community for decades. We look forward to next steps that will honor, be informed by and expand upon this work.

Where are we in the Planning Process?

- Nearly forty attendees from Mecklenburg County attended the North Carolina Family Justice Center Conference in December 2017. The group was inspired by what they learned to explore the possibility of bringing a FJC to Charlotte-Mecklenburg.
- During this conference the Mecklenburg County attendees met and began discussing the initial steps needed to bring the FJC to our county. The group collectively began to develop a steering committee to lead in assessment and planning efforts.
- The steering committee includes representatives from Safe Alliance, CMPD, Pat's Place Child Advocacy Center, Mecklenburg County, the City of Charlotte, the Matthews Police Department, the Davidson Police Department, the 26th Judicial District, and the Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Office as well as survivor representation.
- Safe Alliance and CMPD, have each agreed to dedicate a staff member to serve together as Project Coordinators throughout the Family Justice Center planning process.
- The community hosted a planning study tour conducted by the Alliance for Hope (AFH) in May, 2018 which resulted in the recommendation that Charlotte-Mecklenburg is well positioned to and should move forward with developing a FJC. It is the intent of the Steering Committee that the FJC will surround victims of violence with multiple services by providing access through a proven adaptable model. Place and number of locations will be evaluated considering the community environment and challenges for best fit to assist victims in Mecklenburg County.
- AFH will return to Charlotte September 12th-13th to facilitate setting priorities related to services and facilities and will conduct sessions to help build a framework for implementing the project. AFH will provide a report in fall 2018 to help guide the FJC Steering Committee as it meets with key community partners to determine next steps. It is anticipated that a building or renovation project would take 2+ years in addition to the time required to conduct a capital campaign or otherwise secure funding for the project. The community might also phase in pieces of the FJC over time. Once a plan is in place it will be communicated via the FJC website and mail lists.

How do Justice Centers Relate to Economic Mobility?

- Our interest in the Family Justice Center model intersects closely with the community's ongoing conversation about economic mobility. The *Leading on Opportunity* report calls attention to the growing body of research that documents the profound negative impact of chronic and toxic stress on child and adult health and well-being.
 - Witnessing DV carries devastating impacts for children. Exposure to DV can alter infants' brain development, impairing cognitive and sensory growth.
 - School aged children suffer a higher incidence of anxiety and depression. They are more likely to experience learning difficulties, and less likely to establish positive peer relationships.
 - Teens are more likely to engage in high risk behaviors, including substance use and early sexual activity.
 - Most distressingly, witnessing DV as a child is the single greatest predictor that a child will become a perpetrator or a victim as an adult.
- Against this backdrop, it is no surprise that *Leading on Opportunity* highlights the importance of family stability, access to mental health services for children and adults, and early childhood development as foundational to economic mobility.
- The Family Justice Center model promises to deliver these outcomes for a highly vulnerable population – victims of domestic and sexual violence, and child witnesses of domestic violence.
- Victims will quickly access crisis services. Equally important, victims can also access services to meet longer term needs for health and mental health services, giving both children and caregivers an opportunity to heal from the trauma experienced.
- Because vital services are offered in a single location, and because providers have committed to ongoing coordination and care management, the Family Justice Center can help families address new challenges when they arise, preventing new crises.

www.charmeckfamilyjusticecenter.org

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