



HOPE

Thrives

HERE

The Sacramento Regional Family Justice Center is helping victims of domestic violence, elder abuse, sexual assault, human trafficking and child abuse.



Faith Whitmore is CEO of the Sacramento Regional Family Justice Center, which opened in 2016 to offer convenient wraparound services to victims of family violence.
PHOTO BY MELISSA UROFF

Answering the Call

Family Justice Center aims to end violence by making it easier for victims of abuse to get help

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

WHAT IS FAMILY VIOLENCE? A LOOK AT THE PROBLEM

Family violence is the abuse of an intimate partner, parent or child by a family member. Family violence can happen to anyone, regardless of income, ethnicity or where they live. And it impacts all of us.

1 in 3 women and **1 in 4 men** have been physically abused by an intimate partner.

Approximately **15.5 million children** are exposed to domestic violence every year.

Nationwide, an average of **3 women** are killed by a current or former intimate partner **every day**.

1 in 4 girls and **1 in 6 boys** are sexually abused before the age of 18.

Almost **90 percent of elder abuse** and neglect sufferers are victimized by a family member. Two-thirds of perpetrators are adult children or spouses.

Domestic violence, elder abuse, sexual assault, child abuse and human trafficking are issues that impact all cultures, income brackets and educational levels. Last year, Sacramento County law enforcement agencies received 18,000 emergency calls related to these types of family violence.

“And those are the ones who call,” says Faith Whitmore, CEO of the Sacramento Regional Family Justice Center (SRFJC). “Then you have to factor in how many don’t call.”

Making it easier for victims of abuse to access help is the purpose of the SRFJC. Its ultimate goal: to break the cycle of family violence. “Although it’s no excuse, we know that many abusers have been abused sometime in their childhood,” says Whitmore. “Then they turn around and wreak havoc later in life on those close to them. It’s a horrid cycle that must be broken.”

After four years of planning (spearheaded by retired Sacramento County District Attorney Jan Scully Royse) and input from 124 community stakeholders, the SRFJC opened in 2016, conveniently located inside the Family Court House on Power Inn Road.

The center offers an array of services — all of them free of charge on a walk-in basis — ranging from immediate legal assistance and therapeutic help to collaborating with partners to ensure victims and their families receive everything

they need. “Collaboration is core to our mission. We’re not trying to duplicate the essential services that already exist,” Whitmore says. “But when a person is in crisis they may not know there are 40–70 places to go for help in our region and may not know how to access those services. That is something we can help with, including providing transportation if needed.”

Attorneys are available to assist with preparing restraining order petitions (which run 40–50 pages of legalese), or give expert advice on

family law issues. The SRFJC also has two mobile teams that go out into the community to provide services for those who have transportation challenges: a mobile civil legal team thanks to a grant from the state Office of Emergency Services and a mobile trauma therapy team funded by Dignity Health.

“One of the things that has surprised us is the number of elder abuse clients who come for assistance,” says Whitmore. “With the

exception of the elder clinic offered through McGeorge Law School, we are the only ones to offer individual assistance, pro bono, to this very vulnerable population.”

Whitmore adds, “People often come into our center traumatized and in crisis, and we see them leave with a sense of hope. We couldn’t do this without the support of the community, so we are grateful to those who support us so we, in turn, can support others.”

“Our goal is to break the cycle of family violence.”

Faith Whitmore
CEO, Sacramento Regional Family Justice Center

Keep reading to learn how the Sacramento Regional Family Justice Center is changing lives and changing how we address family violence in our community.

Staci Jones, a social worker for the Sacramento Regional Family Justice Center, says the center offers a warm and inviting place for victims to get help.
PHOTO BY MELISSA UROFF

Where Hope Begins

Center offers assessment, services and legal help in a single location

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

Victims of family violence are often ashamed and frightened — and leaving their abuser may mean giving up a home, financial security and personal possessions. More than three-quarters of them also have children to consider. This is daunting enough, say experts, but when you add in the challenge of the court system — and trying to figure out on your own which agencies can help — it quickly becomes overwhelming. Especially when you are required to tell your story over and over again to strangers, who may or may not speak your native language.

“If you’re told to go here and go there, it’s exhausting and people give up,” says Staci Jones, ASW, a social worker for the Sacramento Regional Family Justice Center (SRFJC). “Clients come to us in crisis.

We want to put a warm blanket around them and take care of all their needs in one location.”

First and foremost is safety, whether that involves staying in the relationship or leaving it. Safety plans are developed specifically for each client, and may include teaching children to dial 911,

and keeping cash, car keys and important documents in a place where you can “grab and go.”

Next, SRFJC addresses basic needs. “If you’re on the streets, you can’t focus on counseling,” Jones says, adding the center can often be more successful obtaining services for clients than if they are searching by themselves. “We can reach out to our community partners to find shelter, food, clothing donations.”

Social workers will also help clients complete forms for CalFresh, CalWORKs or opening a bank account. If needed, they can file reports with Child or Adult Protective Services. All of this assistance is available from a multilingual staff that has access to translators in virtually any language (including sign language).

Similarly, SRFJC’s attorneys provide legal advice on important issues like filing a petition for a restraining order or removing children from the family home. “Many people are afraid the other parent can say they are ‘kidnapping’ them,” says Jones. “But we have an attorney here who will tell them legally what is required.”

Finally, SRFJC will update school counselors and teachers, provide transportation, and link clients to job training and placement. The center also offers individual and group therapy — for both adults and their children. “The biggest thing is our hope to do more with the kids — that’s where our work really lies,” says Jones. “To be able to show them what a healthy relationship looks like.”

“Clients come to us in crisis. We want to put a warm blanket around them and take care of all their needs in one location.”

Staci Jones
Social worker, Sacramento Regional Family Justice Center

CREATING A HUB FOR MULTIPLE RESOURCES

More than 120 local stakeholders helped plan the Sacramento Regional Family Justice Center. “One of the positives here is Sacramento already had a lot of organizations that do good work,” says Paul Durenberger, assistant chief deputy at the Sacramento District Attorney’s Office. “SRFJC is meant to be the hub of a wheel, connecting all sorts of different spokes.”

That means the Family Justice Center’s mobile legal team might be called out to see a client at WEAVE, or law enforcement might refer someone to the center’s physical location — but the goal is to avoid what Durenberger describes as the “typical” experience for victims: “I stand in line and tell my story *again*.”

Current community partners include:

- Sacramento State University
- WEAVE
- My Sister’s House
- A Community for Peace
- Dignity Health
- Child and Adult Protective Services
- City of Refuge
- The Bridge Network
- Chicks in Crisis
- CASH
- Regional Law Enforcement agencies
- Sacramento District Attorney’s Office

Joyce Bilyeu and Marine Kalashyan say the VOICES group gives victims a way to support one another and have a voice in the operation of the Sacramento Regional Family Justice Center.

PHOTO BY MELISSA UROFF

Hearing their Stories

VOICES group offers support and ensures Family Justice Center meets clients' needs

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

It is one thing to be professionally trained as a therapist or attorney, but to truly offer comprehensive care to victims of family violence, you must also hear from survivors.

VOICES is a survivor's group at the Sacramento Regional Family Justice Center that brings this important component into play.

"VOICES members support each other, as well as clients experiencing domestic violence and sexual assault," says VOICES facilitator Joyce Bilyeu. "Members also offer a unique perspective about gaps in service and the effectiveness of our existing programs."

In fact, VOICES members sit on the center's board of directors and work there as volunteers or paid staff — all in an effort to ensure "SRFJC is client-centered and provides trauma-informed services," says Bilyeu.

For example, Marine Kalashyan is a case manager at SRFJC, as well as an active participant in VOICES, a group she says changed her life. "It's the best thing that ever happened to me," she says. "I really don't think I could be where I am today without it — I am very grateful."

Marine is from Armenia. The cultural beliefs, customs and

religion of her community did not make it easy, but she and her two children were able to escape a very violent and abusive marriage.

Until recently Marine was focused on rebuilding her life and had no intention of telling her story to anyone. "Nobody was going to know how beaten up I was, how fragile," she recalls.

She started volunteering at a family resource center in Rancho Cordova and shortly thereafter got hired as a social worker for the AmeriCorps program. As an AmeriCorps member she was required to attend a five-day training on domestic violence, taught by the VOICES facilitator Joyce Bilyeu. "By the third day, I broke down," she says. "It was like I had a deep wound that needed antibiotics. If it wasn't for Joyce — such a mentor, such a friend — pushing me and empowering me to find strength, voice my opinion, and realize I have the right to make a choice — well, she was a godsend for me."

When Joyce finally talked Marine into attending a VOICES meeting, she was further amazed. "There were people from all walks of life," she says. Gradually, she found her voice, and says, "I've been using it ever since, advocating among



"I really don't think I could be where I am today without [VOICES] — I am very grateful."

Marine Kalashyan
VOICES participant

the Armenian, Russian and Slavic communities in hopes that knowledge and resources can make a difference in ending family and domestic violence." She also, happily, accepted a job at the Sacramento Regional Family Justice Center as a case manager to help others who are experiencing domestic violence.

"I was working two jobs including cleaning houses — doing whatever I had to do — so as to not fail my kids. But now my life has changed for the better and all is well," she says. "I am empowered and enjoy helping others. I take pride in the opportunity given to me and am grateful to [Joyce], the members of the group and the Family Justice Center team."

HELP THAT COMES TO YOU

For victims of family violence, getting help can be unduly difficult. "Sacramento is huge and it can be quite difficult for some victims to travel to the courthouse," says Chio Saepanh, director of legal services for the Sacramento Regional Family Justice Center.

Even if victims are able to make it to the court, it can be a very intimidating place. Saepanh says court staff cannot give legal advice and can only answer limited questions.

"The court process is confusing and it takes most people two days to get a

temporary restraining order. It's easy to get frustrated and discouraged," she says. "Add onto that the trauma the victim is going through and you can see how it gets overwhelming very quickly."

That's why SRFJC's mobile legal team travels to victims and takes care of all the

paperwork. Similarly, the new mobile trauma therapy team allows therapists to assist victims at trusted sites.

"With both counseling and legal teams in place, we can offer more holistic services," says Saepanh. "And all our services are free of charge."

Camp HOPE, located in San Luis Obispo County, gives kids from troubled backgrounds a chance to gain resiliency (and just have fun).
PHOTOS COURTESY CAMP HOPE

A Chance to Just Be a Kid

Camp HOPE offers summer fun while addressing the effects of trauma

BY COREY RODDA



At Camp HOPE, children ages 7 to 12 roast marshmallows, zipline through the air and dip their toes in the placid waters of Lopez Lake, located in San Luis Obispo County.

Campers, who come from across California, bring troubled backgrounds — some live in foster homes and group homes. All have been exposed to some form of abuse, neglect, violence or all three.

The retreat is part of Camp HOPE America, which collaborates with family justice centers throughout the country to give children who have experienced trauma the opportunity to be carefree for one week during summer. The Sacramento Regional Family Justice Center sends 10 children to Camp HOPE each year and expects to double that number next year. The center is also expanding supportive activities for kids into a year-round program.

Statistics show children exposed to violence are more likely to attempt suicide, abuse drugs and alcohol, run away from home, be victims of human trafficking, and commit sexual assault crimes. Camp HOPE improves outcomes for these children using evidence-based practices that improve their resiliency toward achieving their goals.

Camp counselors are familiar with the challenges faced by the campers.

“I’ve been homeless. I’ve had a mom who was sick,” says Freddie Silveria, a veteran counselor. “At Camp HOPE I can share that piece of me with the campers and they feel comfortable enough to share their stories with me. Because of this, we form a strong bond. That’s part of the magic of Camp HOPE.”

Some of these conversations among campers and counselors are kindled with the help of a handbook that features readings and conversation starters designed to inspire campers. Campers are also taught to look for the supportive forces in their lives, and look inward to their own strengths and passions.

Each day at Camp HOPE begins with meditation and yoga sessions.

“We help children understand mindfulness and positivity and how soothing it can be to focus on your breath and your senses,” Silveria says.

At the end of the week, children perform skits based on their hopes and dreams and are awarded a certificate based on their strengths.

“These kids look forward to camp every year,” Silveria says. “Most often they don’t get the kind of care and direction that the camp provides. These kids go through tough stuff each day of their lives.”

“We form a strong bond. That’s part of the magic of Camp HOPE.”

Freddie Silveria
Counselor, Camp HOPE

BREAKING THE CYCLE STARTS WITH YOUTH

Many individuals who abuse were abused. And, for too many, family violence dominates their earliest memories and impressions of love. SRFJC hopes to break this cycle so that young victims of abuse and trauma can grow up to start their own peaceful families one day.

Services for youth include:

- Education on teen dating violence and signs to look for
- Art therapy for children and teens
- Creating safety plans with youth and/or their parents
- Case management services
- Transportation and interpreting services
- Court and mediation support
- Referrals to safe shelter
- Restraining orders for youth 12 and up
- Referrals to other community partners serving youth
- Trauma-informed therapy

Learning to Serve Victims

Partnership with Sacramento State provides teaching opportunity for social work and criminal justice students

BY COREY RODDA



"I wanted to help others who had experienced some of the things that I had gone through."

Kathleen Prindle
Sacramento State criminal justice student

When Kathleen Prindle was 8 years old, she saw her father kill her mother. The tragedy inspired her to devote herself to her schoolwork so she could help others heal from the trauma of violence.

"A lot of people go down a bad path and use drug addiction as a crutch or never finish school, but I wanted to help others who had experienced some of the things that I had gone through," she says.

Prindle would eventually attend classes at Sacramento State University, where she majored in criminal justice.

She also had a unique opportunity to make a difference in the lives of victims of trauma, like herself. As a student, Prindle served on a committee that helped to create the Sacramento Regional Family Justice Center, which partners with the school's faculty, staff and students to meet the needs of victims.

"The criminal justice system fails a lot of families," says Prindle.

Prindle hopes SRFJC's partnership with Sacramento State will equip police officers and social workers with a better understanding of how to meet the needs of those affected by trauma.

Sacramento State social work and criminal justice students serve as interns or volunteers at the

Family Justice Center. There, they learn firsthand how to apply psychological first-aid to victims of trauma, who then become calm and assured of their safety, before connecting them to counseling. This approach can reduce the likelihood of post-traumatic stress disorder.

The partnership with Sacramento State has developed a wellspring of research opportunities, too.

Students and professors at Sacramento State's Center for Justice and Policy Research are using data from SRFJC to study the impact of community interventions on the level of domestic violence in Sacramento.

Sacramento State was among the original partners in the Family Justice Center. Fred Baldini, dean of Sacramento State's Department of Health and Human Services and member of the Family Justice Center board, sees the nonprofit as a natural extension of the school's mission and educational offerings.

"This is a critical issue to our community and our students, who will go out and work with victims of domestic violence," Baldini says. "We hope to give them a better appreciation for what it means to be a victim. This is just a wonderful opportunity for the university to do what it is supposed to do — to better the community."

ENDING COLLEGE SEXUAL VIOLENCE

College is a time when many women experience sexual violence. The Justice Department estimates that 1 in 5 women will be raped while they are in college, while only 5 percent of these rapes will be reported. The factors that make college campuses a hot spot for sexual violence include peer pressure, alcohol use, hook-up culture, stress, and lack of education regarding sex and dating.

Hailey Vincent, the victim advocate for Sacramento State, says that the most important way that students can confront this violence is to be active bystanders. If someone looks suspicious and is leading someone who is intoxicated out of a party, Vincent teaches students to create a distraction and connect with the person who is intoxicated to see if they need any help.

The Sacramento Regional Family Justice Center also educates teens on dating violence so they will recognize the warning signs.

Sacramento State criminal justice student Kathleen Prindle played a role in the formation of the Sacramento Regional Family Justice Center, which gives students like Prindle a chance to learn practices that meet the needs of victims.

PHOTO BY MELISSA UROFF



When it's time to Leave

Victims and loved ones can help
recognize the signs of abuse

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

Despite how much abusers might hope to keep family violence a secret, there are almost always signs abuse is occurring, as well as red flags a relationship may become abusive. The trick is to learn to recognize them — for yourself or those you love.

“Controlling behaviors are often the first indicators,” says Joyce Bilyeu, director of client services at the Sacramento Regional Family Justice Center. “Anything (a partner) asks or demands you do to change who you are, your appearance or your behavior, is often a veiled warning sign. Another sign you may be in an abusive relationship is a partner who belittles you. Does your partner tease you in a hurtful way and play it off as a ‘joke’ or tell you you’re being too sensitive? Does your partner call you names, such as ‘stupid’ or ‘bitch’?”

Other red flags, according to experts, include jealousy and accusations you are cheating, as well as the gradual whittling down of your outside activities and relationships. An abusive partner also checks up on you: repeatedly calling, texting or driving by. “The biggest sign is increasing isolation,” says Bilyeu. “You don’t participate in family activities anymore, you can never be alone, and if you are physically alone, your phone keeps blowing up.”

Eventually, your partner might begin to deliberately scare you — hitting walls, driving dangerously, threatening you (or your children, pets, family or friends) with physical violence — so that you begin to “walk on eggshells,” says Bilyeu. “If you are constantly watching what you say or do in order to avoid a blow-up, chances are your relationship is unhealthy and abusive.”

“If you are constantly watching what you say or do in order to avoid a blow-up, chances are your relationship is unhealthy and abusive.”

Joyce Bilyeu
Director of Client Services

Finally, of course, victims of violent physical and sexual abuse are in a potentially life-threatening situation. “Leaving is often the most dangerous time for the victim,” says Bilyeu, because the abusers feel a lack of control and “may retaliate in very destructive ways.”

But this is where a friend or relative can be part of the solution. Avoid judgment or accusations, but make the effort to start the conversation with someone you suspect is a victim of abuse. “People are afraid to ask, but catch (your loved one) alone and be candid and honest: ‘Are you safe? Are the children safe?’” advises Bilyeu. “A family member can even come into SRFJC and we can put together a pocket safety plan for (the victim).” The center also offers education and support groups for concerned family members and friends.

CREATING A SAFETY PLAN

When a victim of family violence visits the Sacramento Regional Family Justice Center, social workers develop an individualized safety plan to help him or her leave the violent situation. It is based on a “lethality assessment,” which helps determine how dangerous the situation is. Plans can also be long-term strategies for leaving.

The goal is to protect the victim — and pets, children or an unborn baby — in the event of a violent attack.

Sample safety plan

- Asking neighbors to call police if they hear violent noises
- Teaching children to dial 911
- Having a code word that can be used during phone calls with friends or family to communicate when you need help
- Removing weapons from the house
- Practicing ways to get out of the house safely
- Hiding a bag containing money, medicine, extra clothes, car keys, phone numbers and important documents at a friend’s or neighbor’s house

IF YOU DON'T FEEL SAFE, contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline to be connected to local assistance: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) (TTY 1-800-787-3224)

Help us help others because

HOPE Thrives HERE



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Walk-In Services – FREE

- Counseling – individual and group
- Safety planning
- Temporary restraining order petitions and support
- Information for loved ones
- Services for children and youth
- Translation services
- Transportation
- Court accompaniment
- Domestic violence education
- Information and referral services to safe shelter
- Elder abuse services



Donate

- Attend the annual Hope Thrives Here Gala Celebration in November
- Make a direct financial contribution via the website, www.HopeThrivesHere.org
- Designate your contribution to the Family Justice Center on the Big Day of Giving in May
- Host a fundraiser in your home
- Include the Family Justice Center in your estate planning
- Support the 100 Men – \$100 fundraiser in October (Domestic Violence Awareness Month)
- Collect items for the online wish list
- Volunteer and donate your time and talent



Partnership opportunities

- Mobile Trauma Therapy Team can visit your organization to provide therapy to victims of human trafficking
- Mobile Civil Legal Team can meet with victims at a domestic violence shelter or community center
- Internships for law, criminal justice and social work students who want to serve SRFJC and gain a deeper understanding of family violence issues
- Trauma informed training