



**SOLANO COUNTY GRAND JURY**  
2016-2017

**SOLANO COUNTY FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER**

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## **I. SUMMARY**

Recognizing the impact of domestic violence on American families, in 2003 President George W. Bush issued an initiative endorsing the concept of a Family Justice Center to support victims of domestic violence. The Solano County Family Justice Center was created to be a central location referred to as a “one-stop shop” where law enforcement and partner agencies work together to support victims of domestic violence. The current Solano County Family Justice Center does not meet expectations as described in the original initiative.

## **II. INTRODUCTION**

A Family Justice Center (FJC) is a multi-functioning civic agency incorporating law enforcement in partnership with community based non-profits that provide recovery assistance to victims of domestic violence. Legal aid, health assessment, child and adult welfare case workers are available. Partner agencies, both on and off-site, provide support, services, resources and victim advocacy programs. Confidential assessment of needs and assistance obtaining restraining orders are available.

The goal is to increase the probability that a victim, having sought out and received support away from their abuser, will feel secure enough to assist prosecution, and let the judicial process proceed toward getting the offender into a post-conviction intervention program.

The phrase “one-stop shop” is commonly used by FJCs to describe the intent to aid and address needs while providing services for victims at one location. Rather than expect a victim to go individually to multiple provider locations and describe a situational history over and over, a FJC is designed to offer a single location to house multiple collaborating providers. Simplifying the process for determining needs of the family violence victim is the goal. Family violence includes spousal/partner abuse, spousal/partner sexual assault, child abuse, and elder abuse.

San Diego, California was the first municipality in the nation to conceptualize and put together a “family justice center” in 2002. Before that center came along, victims there had to seek out help on their own, traveling to multiple locations to get the services they needed.

In October 2003, President George W. Bush announced the creation of the President’s Family Justice Center Initiative. The initiative provided funding to create specialized, co-located, multi-disciplinary centers for victims of family violence. Those centers were designed to reduce the number of places victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and elder abuse must go to receive needed services.

In February 2007, the United States Department of Justice (USDOJ) and The President’s Family Justice Center Initiative document identified the family justice center model as a best practice in the field of domestic violence intervention and prevention services. The USDOJ detailed ten “best practices”<sup>1</sup>:

- *Co-located multi-disciplinary services for victims of family violence and their children increase their safety and support.*
- *Community history of Domestic Violence specialization increases the success of collaboration in the family justice center model.*
- *Offenders must be prohibited from on-site services at centers.*
- *Policies incidental to arrest /enforcement reduces re-victimization of victims.*
- *Pro- arrest/mandatory arrest policies in FJC communities increase accountability for offenders.*
- *Strategic planning is critical to short and long term success in the family justice model.*
- *Strong/diverse community support increases resources for victims and their children.*
- *Strong support from local elected officials and other local and state government policymakers increases the effectiveness and sustainability of family justice centers.*
- *Victim confidentiality must be a priority.*
- *Victim safety/advocacy must be the highest priority in the family justice center service delivery model.*

In 2014, the State of California passed Assembly Bill 1623 (AB1623) adding Title 5.3–Family Justice Centers to Part 4 of the California Penal Code §13750. This law states that a city, county or community based organization “*may* establish a family justice center” and defines family justice centers as “*multiagency, multidisciplinary service centers where public and private agencies assign staff members on a full-time or part-time basis in order to provide services to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, elder or dependent adult abuse and human trafficking from one location in order to reduce the number of times victims must tell their story, reduce the number of places victims must go for help, and increase access to services and support for victims and their children.*” The law sets specific criteria and standards with which a family justice center must comply.

The Solano County Family Justice Center (SCFJC) is administered by the District Attorney’s Office of Family Violence Prevention (OFVP) and provides support to victims of family violence to assist in the prosecution of their abusers. One responsibility of the OFVP Officer is to serve as the Director of the SCFJC.

The 2016-2017 Solano County Grand Jury tasked itself with a review of the SCFJC to assess the level of effectiveness and its accomplishments.

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<sup>1</sup> The Presidents’ Family Justice Center Initiative, Best Practices, February, 2007.

### III. METHODOLOGY

Interviewed:

- Current and former Office of Family Violence Prevention employees
- District Attorney employees
- Member of the Solano County Board of Supervisors
- Members of the Solano County Family Justice Center Foundation
- Partner agency administrators
- Police Chiefs and employees
- Solano County Sheriff employees

Reviewed:

- California Assembly Bill 1623
- Family Justice Center White Papers, September 2011 and June 2015
- News articles: Fairfield Daily Republic, San Diego Union-Tribune
- Pamphlet: *Domestic Violence Law – A Force to Be Reckoned With!* Donald P. Schweitz (Domestic Law Attorney, Pasadena, Ca)
- Solano Center for Family Safety and Justice - Feasibility Study: Solano County June 2008
- Solano County Family Justice Center *Operations Manual*: Revised edition October 2016
- Solano County OFVP website
- Strategic Implementation Plan Solano Family Justice Center: Presentation before the Solano County Board of Supervisors, November 1, 2011 / video and related material
- The President's Family Justice Center Initiative: U.S. Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women February 2007
- Title 5.3 – Family Justice Centers California Penal Code § 13750

Toured: Solano County Family Justice Center

#### **IV. STATEMENT OF FACTS**

The Solano County Family Justice Center (SCFJC) operates within the Office of Family Violence Prevention (OVFP) under the administration of the Solano County District Attorney's Office. The OFVP was created by the Board of Supervisors in 1998 to work collaboratively with local public and private organizations to reduce family violence in Solano County.

The 2016-2017 Solano County Grand Jury organized key facts of the SCFJC report under four categories identified by the 2011 Strategic Implementation Plan: Site (Environment and Adequacy), Partnerships, Program, and Sustainability/Budget.

##### **Site: Environment and Adequacy**

An original goal for the SCFJC stated in the 2011 Plan was to "create a user-friendly environment for victims and their families that encourages effective partner collaboration." The SCFJC is located at 604 Empire Street in Fairfield. The OFVP staff is assigned to this site alongside four partners. The building measures roughly 10,000 square feet. At the writing of this report, the SCFJC consists of one dedicated exam room, one closed-circuit viewing room, staff and partner offices and a large multipurpose room that is used for different reasons, one being after-hours supervised visitation. The building is well-maintained and decorated primarily with children in mind. There is a well-designed security system in place that meets the criteria for justice centers. In the past, grant funders had concerns that the location would have both offender and victim on the site at the same time. A revised security adjustment addresses these situations and personnel take steps to avoid chance meetings.

According to the current SCFJC Operations Manual, a continuing goal is to eventually acquire a building of 30,000 square feet to accommodate more on-site partners to better serve victims and their children as a "one-stop shop". A large room currently used by the OFVP staff is not divided for private office space. While there is a large conference table in one area of the Safe Harbor supervised visitation room, there is no sound-proofed divider to permit private group meetings in that area. The present 10,000 square foot building is smaller than the original goal. There is little room for expansion of the number of on-site partners.

The present location was affirmed as permanent by the Solano County Board of Supervisors in June 2015.

##### **Partnerships**

An original strategic priority for the SCFJC was to develop partnerships. The stated goal was to "create a collaborative culture and structure for the FJC based on a shared vision and values that support teamwork and effective communication among all partners to sustain and enhance service delivery."

The number of partners varied through the years. An original goal was that "by six months before opening, on-site program partners will be identified." Grant funding realities brought

some partners on-site for periods of time, but not permanently. The evolution of partnerships is as follows:

- Thirty-four different agencies were involved in the original planning and kick-off events for the Family Justice Center.
- In 2010, it was reported that over 60 agencies met as a coalition to kick off planning; many partnerships were to be “off-site”.
- In 2014, an update to the Board of Supervisors specified four on-site partners in addition to the OFVP and the Sheriff’s Office: LIFT3, Child Haven, a pro bono attorney and Catholic Social Services.
- A second pro bono attorney is now involved with the program. Neither attorney is available on a full time basis at the Center. Victims are seen by appointment.
- Catholic Charities is no longer on-site.
- LIFT3 is no longer on-site.
- SafeQuest Solano is now on-site.
- The Solano Coalition for Better Health is on-site every Wednesday.
- Courage Center II, a Child Advocacy Center (CAC), opened in February 2016 for a one-year pilot program. Law enforcement agencies in the county make use of the CAC.

Printed information and referral assistance is available for “clients” from some of the current off-site partners such as the Area Agency on Aging, Children’s Network, the Food Bank, Catholic Charities, and First 5 Solano.

Partners are responsible for their own staffs and expenses. Partners work independently but in conjunction with the SCFJC staff. They can share limited information but are required to follow strict rules of confidentiality. State and Federal grant applications may be written by a partner or SCFJC staff according to appropriate opportunities.

### **Program**

The original strategic priority was to “Develop and provide a comprehensive wrap-around system of high-quality, culturally and linguistically sensitive, client-oriented services to the diverse population of domestic violence victims and their families.” During the first years of operation, the SCFJC established a specific location, built partnerships and developed relationships with agencies and services that could serve domestic violence victims.

The 2016 Operations Manual identifies service delivery protocols. It identifies a Management Committee (Advisory) that exists for “the purpose of sharing information, discussing new issues and policies, and implementing the goals and objectives of the SCFJC.” This committee has not met regularly for this purpose in recent months.

In 2015, the SCFJC hosted a domestic violence multi-disciplinary case study where agencies came together to study one situation, compare notes and, where needed, help find appropriate programs and resources for a victim of domestic violence. That meeting was noted as valuable by an off-site partner who wishes the process would return. The case study concept has not been repeated since 2015.

There is recent attention to the needs of the culturally and linguistically diverse population of victims and their families; the new director, one intake specialist and one of the pro bono attorneys is Spanish-bilingual. Referrals are made to Catholic Charities for help with visa issues. A new grant awarded in June 2016 from the California Office of Emergency Services is providing \$350,000 funding for two years to address victim advocacy in the Filipino community. Funds are designated for two full-time bilingual Tagalog-speaking Victim Witness Advocates to lead advocacy efforts within the Filipino community, including developing trauma-informed culturally-sensitive direct services, developing outreach programs and materials, and establishing a referral process for Filipino victims.

Having only one location presents a challenge for programs at the Center. Being close to the Courthouse and other County offices is an asset. However, transportation challenges make it difficult for victims in other parts of the county to utilize the services provided at the SCFJC. At this time there is no plan to develop satellite locations in the county. Furthermore, there is no established shuttle system in the County to the SCFJC.

Victims often learn about the SCFJC from other organizations and agencies rather than from the Center itself. The Resource Guide to the SCFJC services has not been updated. Website links are not kept current on OFVP website. There are nine Family Resource Centers (not to be confused with the Family Justice Center) throughout the County that refer people to the SCFJC. In Vallejo, the Catholic Charities Organization also provides services to those who are looking for assistance regarding domestic violence.

As first responders, local law enforcement officers often have contact with domestic violence victims throughout the county:

- Benicia, Dixon, Rio Vista and the City of Suisun City Police Departments all report that they give victims resource pamphlets including a listing for the SCFJC. These police departments also make referrals to other available services.
- Fairfield Police Department has a well-established domestic violence unit. The officers bring or refer domestic violence victims to the city's own unit. In 2015, the unit provided service to 600 - 700 clients. The police utilize Courage Center II in the SCFJC for matters related to child abuse services such as interviews and forensic examinations.
- Vacaville Police Department has the Family Investigative Response Services Team (FIRST) unit fully funded by the city police department. They typically handle about 300 cases a year. The unit has been in existence since 1996 and uses Courage Center II for appropriate child-related services.
- Vallejo Police Department has two detectives assigned to investigate sexual assault cases in the city. Patrol officers follow up on domestic violence cases and provide information about local resources. The Department provided the following data from their city: "between January 1, 2016, to November 30, 2016: domestic violence criminal reports: 550; Child Abuse Criminal reports: 26." They utilize the Courage Center II in Fairfield for child-related services.
- Solano County Sheriff's Office refers domestic violence victims directly to the SCFJC.

There was one Director for the Center from its opening until October 31, 2014. Since November 1, 2014 the position of Family Violence Prevention Officer/SCFJC Director was filled as a permanent position for 3.5 months in 2015. An Interim Director for the SCFJC was in place from July 2015 to February 2017. That person did not serve as the Family Violence Prevention Officer. A hiring process for a new director began in November 2016 and a new Family Violence Prevention Officer /FJC Director was hired in February 2017.

Data provided by the OFVP indicates that victims served in the last year (2015-2016) have not reached the levels of previous years. The chart below shows the number of victims served as reported by the Solano County Family Violence Intervention Team.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Victims served</b>
July 2013 - June 2014	387
July 2014 - June 2015	509
July 2015 - June 2016	231

Comparable numbers for 2016-2017 were not available.

**Sustainability / Budget**

In October 2014, in a report to the Solano County Board of Supervisors on the 30-month pilot for the SCFJC, sustainability goals were addressed. In the pilot “Terms and Conditions”, it was stated that the DA “will take steps to identify sources of funding to reduce the General Fund costs and to position the SCFJC to be self-sufficient following the 30-month pilot period.” The long-term funding plan included grant writing, fundraising, developing lease agreements with partners, as well as using dedicated portions of County marriage license and other special fees.

Since 2010, the SCFJC has enjoyed varying success in acquiring grant funds from the United States Department of Justice and other sources. Each grant has a specific work plan with funds provided for a limited term, typically one to three years. Most of the larger grants have included money to pay for one to three staff positions at the Center. There is one year left on the USDOJ \$300,000 GTEAP grant (Grants To Encourage Arrest Policies). The \$450,000 Safe Harbor for Kids grant was not renewed in September, 2016. In June 2016, CalOES (California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services) awarded the SCFJC \$350,000 for two years to improve services in Tagalog. Courage Center II received \$90,000 from Kaiser in February 2016 for a one year pilot project. Success in receiving grants has varied over time, ranging from a high of \$900,000 in 2009-2010 to no new grants received in 2014-2015.

Fundraising plans for the center originally included a significant role for the SCFJC Foundation, a 501(c)(3) formed in 2013. A non-profit 501(c)(3) is an important avenue for fundraising and certain grant opportunities. In the pilot plan, the goal for the foundation was to raise \$18,000 by June 30, 2015, which was achieved. In March 2016, the Foundation Board severed ties with the Center. The current 2016 Operations Manual still includes a reference to the Foundation in the graphic depiction of the Organizational Structure of SCFJC.

At the conclusion of the 30-month pilot program in June 2015, the SCFJC staff reported, “Sustainability for both the FJC program and building at 604 Empire Street requires minimal contributions from the General Fund.” The plan was to have partners pay some of the occupancy costs once the pilot was over, and to provide their own computers, furniture, supplies, etc. During the pilot program months, several large federal grants were awarded and activities at the Center were funded mainly from those grants. The 2016-2017 Solano County Grand Jury reviewed more recent Solano County annual budget documents to determine the current budget situation. The contribution from the County has increased.

The Solano County annual budget document identifies funding the SCFJC as part of the District Attorney’s budget (5500- Fund 001 – Office of Family Violence Prevention). The budget document states, *“This budget unit was established in the General Fund to record funding to administer violence prevention activities on a countywide basis, and enable the Office of Family Violence Prevention to receive and separately account for various Federal, State, and private foundation grants, as mandated by funding agency guidelines. A portion of OFVP’s requested appropriations are offset by dedicated revenue sources including Domestic Violence Oversight/Vital Records Fees. The OFVP also serves as a pass-through agency for award of Battered Women’s Shelter Fees and Marriage License Fee Surcharge Funding collected pursuant to the California State Domestic Violence Centers Act.”*

The 2016-2017 Adopted Budget identified funds for five positions in the OFVP, all located at the SCFJC. Two of the positions are County funded:

- Family Violence Prevention Officer (1.0)
- Office Assistant III (1.0)

Three of the positions are grant-funded:

- Assistant Family Violence Prevention Coordinator (2.0; one position ended September 30, 2016.)
- Social Worker III (1.0)

In addition, a part-time trained forensic interviewer for Courage Center II was funded through a \$90,000 grant until November 6, 2016. Funding for the position since that time is unclear.

A Victim Witness Advocate, funded by a different portion of the District Attorney’s budget, also works at the Empire Street location. Other DA Advocate positions are located in other county buildings.

The following chart shows OFVP budget comparison information for the last four years.

Budget Year Actuals except for 2016-17	Total Expenditures \$	Net County Cost \$	% Net County Cost to Total Expenditures
2013-14 pilot year	916,003	423,237	46.2%
2014-15 pilot year	916,762	486,669	53.1%
2015-16	739,088	381,760	51.7%
2016-17 (budget)	841,704	521,169	61.9%

After reviewing complete budget documents, the 2016-2017 Solano County Grand Jury made the following observations:

- The percent of the budget identified as Net County Cost is anticipated to increase this year by 10% from 2015-2016. It has risen 15% since June, 2014. It appears this increase is due mainly to increased salary costs and reduced grant income. We also note that actual salary costs do not include the value of vacant positions.
- One source of income is Miscellaneous Revenue. It is not clear what is planned to meet the 2016-2017 budgeted value (\$69,305) since there is no Foundation activity to support fundraising. If the actual income from Miscellaneous Revenue is closer to the average of the previous three years (\$28,920), then the Net County Cost would be higher (\$561,554).
- Outside grant income has fallen significantly each year since the pilot year peak of 2013-2014. The end of a Department of Justice grant in September 2016 resulted in the loss of a major source of program income. The second Department of Justice grant is scheduled to end in September 2017.
- OFVP salaries and benefits costs have fluctuated annually and we noted that several key positions have been vacant in some of those years. At least two positions each year have been grant-funded.
- The annual budget for the OFVP includes \$44,000 income from marriage license fees. Original budget estimates were for \$80,000 per year.

As opposed to being “fiscally-neutral”, the cost of the SCFJC to Solano County has increased. The original planned system for fundraising has not been successful in recent years. The SCFJC does not have a permanent grant writer and a foundation for fundraising is not currently active.

## **V. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Finding 1** – The Solano County Family Justice Center building does not accommodate a sufficient number of on-site partners or provide adequate privacy.

**Recommendation 1** – The Solano County Family Justice Center reconfigure the current building to accommodate more on-site partners to reach the model of a “one-stop shop” and provide sufficient privacy.

**Finding 2** – The number of on-site partners has been inconsistent and the “one-stop shop” idea has not developed as envisioned.

**Recommendation 2** – Solano County Family Justice Center actively recruits more on-site partners to better serve domestic violence victims with the comprehensive services they will need for support.

**Finding 3** –Transportation to the Solano County Family Justice Center does not effectively serve the needs of clients.

**Recommendation 3** – The Solano County Family Justice Center secure funding to effectively provide transportation to its clients.

**Finding 4** –There is insufficient public awareness of the Solano County Family Justice Center for victims to identify what resources, support and services are available.

**Recommendation 4** – Solano County and the Office of Family Violence Prevention update current resource guides and websites to list what resources, support and services are available at the Solano County Family Justice Center for domestic violence victims and their families.

**Finding 5** – Funding from the County to provide sufficient financing for the Solano County Family Justice Center has increased.

**Recommendations 5a** - Solano County Office of Family Violence Prevention staff increase expertise in grant-writing and aggressively pursue new grants to reduce county expenses for the Family Justice Center.

**Recommendations 5b** - Solano County Family Justice Center establish a relationship with a non-profit foundation to help solidify the Center’s financial stability.

**Finding 6** – There is no regular calendar of meetings for collaboration between domestic violence victim support agencies in the County to address both duplication and adequacy of services available.

**Recommendation 6** – The Solano County Office of Family Violence Prevention conduct quarterly collaborative meetings of domestic violence victim support agencies.

**REQUIRED RESPONSES**

Solano County Board of Supervisors (Findings 1, 2, 3, 5)

Solano County Office of Family Violence Prevention (All findings)

**COURTESY COPY**

Solano County District Attorney

## GLOSSARY

- **Child-Haven:** Child-Haven's clinical staff is qualified and capable of treating multiple and co-occurring types of social and emotional health issues, attachment disorders, post-traumatic stress disorders of children ages birth-21 years of age, while recognizing and appreciating the diverse and cultural needs of child and family.
- **Courage Center II:** Provides a safe child-friendly place for suspected victims of child abuse. The center conducts forensic examinations and gives interview support by a multi-disciplinary team of professionals that include forensic interpreters, law enforcement and medical practitioners trained to work with vulnerable children.
- **Pro Bono Attorneys:** Provide family law counseling at no charge.
- **Safe Harbor Program:** Provides supervised visitation in a safe, structured environment for children of domestic violence and child abuse to visit with their non-custodial parent. Visits are monitored and supervised in collaboration with the Solano County District Attorney's Office and the county's judicial system.
- **SafeQuest Solano:** Provides a 24-hour crisis hotline, SART (Sexual Assault Response Team), state-certified emergency shelter, youth transitional housing, individual peer counseling, protection order assistance and court accompaniment, human trafficking advocacy and Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) Advocacy, victim advocacy, case management, community referrals, community education, safety planning, school based prevention education programs, confidential address program, financial empowerment, elder abuse program.
- **Family Resource Centers:** There are nine Family Resource Centers (FRC) in Solano County that provide information and referral services to families with children. FRCs assist families in identifying and accessing community resources to meet their needs, including parenting, family recreation, job search, transportation, child care basic needs, etc. FRCs also offer parenting and resource libraries, parenting classes, computer and internet access for job search and resume writing, and much more. FRCs are located throughout Solano County. FRCs are not part of the Family Justice Center; they refer clients for services as appropriate.