2020/2021 **Biennial Report**

VENTURA COUNTY Family Justice Center



VENTURA COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

ERIK NASARENKO DISTRICT ATTORNEY





District 1 Supervisor Matt LaVere



District 2 Supervisor Linda Parks



District 3 Supervisor Kelly Long



District 4 Supervisor Bob Huber



District 5 Supervisor Carmen Ramirez

Thank you to the County of Ventura Board of Supervisors and the County Executive Office for their leadership, vision, and support in helping to establish the first-ever Family Justice Center in Ventura County. Since opening in 2019, more than 5,700 victims and survivors have received services at the Ventura County Family Justice Center.

Numbers Served

During this reporting period, the VCFJC served more than 5,700 victims and survivors. Nearly 83% of those served were female.





aily, it takes many hands to help victims in need at the Center, and no one person or agency can meet all of the varied needs that victims and their families may present. For example, one victim's critical need might be housing, another's crisis counseling. Yet, others may need translation and assistance with obtaining a restraining order. The success of the Center in meeting these unique needs rests in the strengths of its collective partnerships. To all of the partnering organizations who have committed talent and treasure to the Center, THANK YOU. To the Ventura County Board of Supervisors who have invested in the Center, THANK YOU. To the Ventura County Family Justice Center Foundation Board of Directors and staff who raise funds for facilities and programming, THANK YOU. To every one of the volunteers, donors, and supporters who give of themselves to help others at the Center, THANK YOU. To all of the community groups, community-based organizations, city councils, service clubs, school districts, colleges and universities, town halls, and community events that collaborate and support the Center through outreach events, THANK YOU. You help get the word out to victims one person at a time. Finally, to the entire team at the Center, whose courage, character, and compassion help people in need find strength and healing daily, THANK YOU.

THE VENTURA COUNTY FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER

The mission of the Ventura County Family Justice Center is to support and improve the lives of those impacted by family violence and trauma. Our collaborative approach creates a safe space where we use strength-based practices to end abuse and exploitation, pursue justice, and create pathways to hope. A team from more than 40 public agencies, community-based organizations and volunteers work together to help reduce trauma, eliminate repeat victimization, mitigate future risks, and make a lasting, positive difference in the lives of those we serve and their families. This welcoming community of comprehensive holistic services empowers and supports survivors of all ages and their families.



Family Justice Center Lobby



Family Justice Center Client Navigation Room



Family Justice Center Champions:

Left to right: Chief Deputy District Attorney Mike Jump, Assemblyperson Jacqui Irwin, District Attorney Greg Totten (retired), Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson (retired), Undersheriff Monica McGrath (retired), District Attorney Erik Nasarenko, Sheriff Bill Ayub and Supervisor Linda Parks

THE FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER TEAM







Sally Cardona Admin Assistant I

Monica Villa Victim Associate III

Kelly Muklevicz Admin Assistant I **Rachael Watkins Client Services** Manager

Marie Villa Senior Program Administrator



Chief Deputy

District Attorney

Diane Melendez Victim Associate III



Candice Justus Victim Associate III

Joyce Donehue FJC Development & **Outreach Manager**



Karla Llamas Victim Associate II

Ana Avendano Torres Conan Perdomo Legal Victim Associate II Processing Assistant



Gloria Solorzano & Trakr Senior Victim Advocate



Youth Programs Manager

Yvonne Pampalone Data and Operations Manager

Elizabeth Elizondo Supervising Victim Advocate

Operations Manager

Karen Simpson Youth Programs and

Mike Munn

District Attorney Investigator

District Attorney Victim Advocates and staff from other partner agencies at the Center serve as Client Navigators and work with Family Justice Center clients. They serve as a trusted point of contact for initial and ongoing services. Navigators work with each client to complete a comprehensive needs and risk assessment, identify goals and outcomes each client would like to achieve, and connect clients to the many on and off-site partner agencies available to meet their needs.

District Attorney Victim Advocates work diligently to ensure survivors are heard, their rights are honored, and they are connected to services to help them cope with the trauma they have endured. Advocates provide a variety of services, including but not limited to individual safety planning, victim compensation application assistance, crisis intervention, emergency assistance, court advocacy, orientation to the criminal justice system, restraining order assistance, victims' rights information, notification of inmate release and support during law enforcement interviews.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE

The Family Justice Center staff quickly rose to the challenges and uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic and continued to provide essential services to our clients without closure. New practices were adopted and innovations were created to overcome social distancing requirements and telework challenges by moving many services to a digital/teleconferencing framework.



FJC COVID quarantine quarters for health care workers



FJC COVID quarantine quarters for health care workers

The Ventura County Superior Court collaborated with us to accept e-filed domestic violence and elder abuse restraining order petitions followed by remote video court appearances. This improved process has been widely praised by restraining order petitioners for its convenience and reduction in stress associated with court appearances at the Hall of Justice.

Since the pandemic caused many victims to remain in their homes with their offenders and children lost day-to-day contact with mandated reporters, a dedicated text-line and e-mail account were created for victims to use to make contact privately and discretely to explore services and options for assistance. These new options were advertised via the County's COVID-19 updates, news releases, webcasts, virtual town halls with local legislators, posted in grocery and big-box stores, and distributed with meals delivered to seniors and quarantined residents throughout Ventura County.

The Family Justice Center partnered with the Ventura County Family Justice Center Foundation, the Ventura County Health Care Agency, the Health Care Foundation for Ventura County, Ventura County Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services, and Ventura Rentals to convert an unoccupied building at the Center to temporary quarantine quarters for healthcare workers from the Ventura County Medical Center. This provided a quarantine shelter for up to eight healthcare workers during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. This facility and the furnishings provided will be used as temporary emergency housing for victims beginning in 2023.

These unprecedented circumstances and adaptations led to permanent improvements in the way services are provided to victims and their families in Ventura County.

VOICES OF VENTURA COUNTY

Voices of Ventura County was formed in 2017 to raise awareness about domestic violence, sexual assault, elder abuse, human trafficking, and child abuse within our community. It is led by brave survivors who come together to share their stories of strength, courage, and empowerment to be a voice for those who don't yet have one. Members have been by our side throughout the development and planning of the Center and offer invaluable input and survivor perspectives beyond any professional experience or statistical data. All phases of design and service delivery were done in consultation with Voices of Ventura County.





Regina Rutherford, Voices of Ventura County co-Chair



"Voices members inspire us with their strength and commitment to improving pathways to hope and healing for others that were not available for them when they suffered victimization. They are my heroes and are the very essence of our mission and purpose."

> ~ Retired District Attorney Gregory D. Totten



Jillian Abbott-Gonzalez, Voices of Ventura County member



Regina Rutherford, Voices of Ventura County co-Chair and daughter Aja Madrigal

SAFE HARBOR VENTURA COUNTY (MULTIDISCIPLINARY INTERVIEW CENTERS AND CHILD ADVOCACY CENTERS)

In 2020, Safe Harbor West successfully relocated to the Family Justice Center. Safe Harbor East continues to operate in Simi Valley, assisting victims in the east county. Both centers are open to serve victims of sexual assault 24-hours a day. At Safe Harbor, clients participate in forensic interviews, meet with investigators, and work with victim advocates to receive support and referrals. The addition of Axon camera systems to the Safe Harbor interview rooms has allowed prosecutors to observe interviews and receive evidence from law enforcement in real time.



Multi-Disciplinary & Safe Harbor case review team members



Safe Harbor exam room

Safe Harbor waiting room

Safe Harbor offers forensic sexual assault and child abuse exams through a partnership with the Ventura County Health Care Agency Forensic Examiner Program. Their team, led by Medical Director Dr. Aimee Brecht-Doscher and SANE Coordinator, respond on-call 24 hours a day to Safe Harbor sites to provide exams. The Coalition for Family Harmony, the designated rape crisis center of Ventura County, also responds on-call to provide support and counseling inside the exam room. Victims are never charged for Safe Harbor or Family Justice Center services.

SAFE HARBOR VENTURA COUNTY (MULTIDISCIPLINARY INTERVIEW CENTERS AND CHILD ADVOCACY CENTERS)



Forensic Nurse Examiner Team

Left to right: Mara Landa, on-call SANE nurse; Lorraine Sandoval, on-call SANE nurse; Gina D'Aquilla, SANE Nurse Coordinator; Dr. Aimee Brecht-Doscher, Medical Director; Sheri Dungan, on-call SANE nurse; Keiti King, on-call SANE nurse and Lisa Magallanes, on-call SANE nurse



Marie Villa, Safe Harbor Coordinator

Both of the Safe Harbor Centers in Ventura County are accredited Child Advocacy Centers. The Centers provide a child-friendly environment where law enforcement, child protective services, prosecution, mental health, medical, and victim advocacy professionals work together to investigate abuse, help children heal, and hold offenders accountable. Team members collaborate on strategies that aid investigators and prosecutors without causing further trauma to the child. This innovative approach significantly increases the likelihood of successful outcomes in court and long-term healing.

HEALTHCARE FOR JUSTICE FOUNDATION

Led by Dr. Anthony Walls, the Healthcare for Justice Foundation team works with our staff at Safe Harbor West. Dr. Walls accepts referrals from a variety of agencies and provides general healthcare services to survivors of human trafficking, domestic violence, and sexual assault. These clients are also able to connect directly to the Family Justice Center partners and services while onsite.



Left to right: Dr. Anthony S. Walls, MD; Emily Walls, Family Nurse Practitioner & Gina D'Aquilla, SANE Nurse Coordinator

CAMP HOPE AMERICA - VENTURA COUNTY

Camp HOPE America is the first evidence-based camping and mentoring program for children ages 7 to 17 exposed to domestic violence in the United States. The goal of the program is to end the generational cycle of domestic violence by offering healing and hope to children who have been affected by family violence or experienced child abuse. The District Attorney's Office implemented the Camp HOPE program in Ventura County in 2015.

Due to COVID-19, the weeklong outdoor camps were canceled in 2020. Still, many of our campers participated in events and activities hosted virtually.

Our campers and camp staff were happy to return to camp in person in August 2021 at Camp Wasewagan near Big Bear Lake. With generous support from the community, 27 campers, 13 counselors, and 12 adult staff were able to participate after receiving a health check and COVID-19 tests.

Activities included archery, fishing, paddleboarding, kayaking, mountain biking, a ropes course, and other fun camp activities. At nightly campfires, campers discussed the daily Hope Hero highlighted in the Camp HOPE curriculum. Each camper received a Character Trait Award recognizing an outstanding personal quality. Counselors led campfire songs, mentored, and provided constant support and care for the campers.

CAMP HOPE AMERICA – VENTURA COUNTY

Thank you to the following people for their support, kindness, and contributions that made Camp Wasewagan a success: Dr. Chris Landon, ACEs Aware/Landon Pediatric Foundation – pre-departure health check; Dr. Kristyna Fong, Ventura County Health Care Agency – camp medical staff & impromptu yoga instructor; Graal Diaz, PhD, Ventura County Health Care Agency – camp medical staff & impromptu yoga instructor; Frank Campos, former owner of Lousey NitPickers – provided lice checks and Patrick Maynard, Ventura County Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services – supplied COVID-19 testing kits.



Camp Wasewagan - counselors in blue, campers in green and adult staff in purple



Departure Day



Camper navigating rope course



Camper enjoying hearty breakfast to start the day



Camper enjoying s'more time

CAMP HOPE AMERICA – VENTURA COUNTY



Paddle boarding in Big Bear Lake



Pool time-camper learning to swim



Camper mastering the Cat's Cradle game

PATHWAYS TO PROMISE PROGRAM

In 2021, a year-round Pathways to Promise program was developed thanks to Jupneet Singh, a student intern from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) who volunteered at the Center for more than a year. Jupneet sought and received four fellowships and \$8,400 to launch the program. The proceeds funded monthly remote events for the children enrolled in the program. The online events included:

- » A presentation by Dr. Thomas Duncan, Trauma Medical Director for the Ventura County Medical Center.
- » A vision board art project with Michele Foster, art teacher with Bell Arts Factory.
- » A STEAM project led by KidSTREAM.
- » Virtual field trips to the Channel Islands National Park and Joshua Tree National Park.



Karen Simpson, CAMP Hope Coordinator & Jupneet Sign, student volunteer

COURTHOUSE DOGS

Three certified facility dogs joined the District Attorney's Office to support and accompany victims and witnesses as they navigate the criminal justice system. Star, Trakr, and Comet were placed with the Ventura County District Attorney's Office by Assistance Dogs of the West and received over two years of training. They have been certified through Assistance Dogs International. Trakr works full-time at the Center.

Ventura County District Attorney employees:

Gloria Solorzano, Victim Advocate; Facility Dog Trakr; Jillian Ewan, Deputy District Attorney; Jennifer Barbettini, Supervising Victim Advocate; Facility Dog Comet; Corina Wondoloski, Senior District Attorney Investigator; Rachelle Dean, Chief Deputy District Attorney; Facility Dog Star, and Andrea Stewart, Victim Advocate





Trakr, Star & Comet

EAGLE SCOUT PROJECTS

Camarillo Boy Scout Troop 262 selected the Family Justice Center for four Eagle Scout Projects. The projects included the creation and installation of a recycling center, a landscaping beautification project, the construction of a canopied lounge area for the shelter space, and the buildout of pantry space for essential supplies for our clients and their children.



Flower Wall

Recycle Center



Canopied Lounge Area



Pantry/Storage

OXNARD SATELLITE FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER

Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin (D-44) secured a \$1 million allocation in the 2021-2022 California State Budget to develop a Family Justice Center satellite office in Oxnard. The Oxnard Center will serve as a community-based resource center for Oxnard victims, with a particular emphasis on assisting the Mixteco, Indigenous, and farmworker communities. Thanks to her efforts, underserved communities will have greater access to intervention, support, and counseling in a culturally sensitive and language-appropriate manner. The search for an appropriate facility is underway.

The Ventura County Family Justice Center is a model for the State and this investment will allow the County to expand its services closer to communities in need. The work that is done here is truly amazing. The staff here collaborates with more than 35 agencies, dedicated to a shared vital cause: to reduce trauma, eliminate repeat victimization, mitigate future risks and make a lasting positive difference in countless lives."

~ Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin, VC Star article, 11-7-2021



Left to right: Supervisor Carmen Ramirez, Oxnard Mayor John Zaragoza, Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin, District Attorney Erik Nasarenko, Family Justice Center Foundation Board member Dianne McKay and Supervisor Matt LaVere

SERVICES AND SUPPORT FOR SURVIVORS OF MASS VIOLENCE

The Ventura County District Attorney's Office and the Ventura County Family Justice Center, with funding provided by the California Victims Compensation Board have partnered with Give an Hour, a national nonprofit, to offer long term mental health services at no cost to survivors of the Route 91 Harvest Music Festival shooting in 2017. So Cal Route 91 Heals offers weekly virtual support groups, emotional life skills psychoeducation, an online trauma resource library, mental health referrals, and a Trauma-Informed Peer Support program. This evidence-based reciprocal peer support model trains survivors to offer emotional support, teach skills, and create connection through a shared experience.

In addition to working in parallel with the Vegas Strong Resiliency Center, So Cal Route 91 Heals has established a Community Partner Collaborative comprised of governmental and nonprofit agencies that share strengths and identify gaps in services to provide streamlined trauma-informed services to survivors of mass violence.



Survivors created Hope Cards with messages of hope and healing to be shared with survivors and families



Route 91 Peer Supporters read the names of the 58 lives taken and honored them with a moment of silence

San Bernardino Courthouse Facility Dogs Lupe (left) and Dozer (far right) and Ventura County Courthouse Facility Dogs Trakr and Star (middle) provide emotional support at the Route 91 Remembrance



Give an Hour-ribbon





Route 91 survivors and families gather in October of 2021 at the Borderline Healing Garden in Thousand Oaks to honor, observe and support one another



District Attorney Erik Nasarenko visits with Route 91 survivors during the Memorial Sunrise Service in October of 2021

PURCHASE OF BUILDING

The Ventura County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously on June 15, 2021, to purchase the Family Justice Center facility located on Loma Vista Road in Ventura for \$3.9 million. The District Attorney's Office had leased the property at a cost of nearly \$350,000 per year since July 2019, with grant funding from the California Office of Emergency Services. The Board's investment reinforces the County's long-term commitment to the Center and its work on behalf of crime victims.



– Supervisor Kelly Long

"Very proud to support" – Supervisor Matt LaVere



Grand Opening Ribbon Cutting

VICTIMS OF VIOLENT CRIME-EMERGENCY ENTRY TO EXIT PROGRAM (VIP-EEE)

The Center is located across the street from the Ventura County Medical Center and partners with its trauma services team. Since 2019, more than 400 patients have been referred to the Family Justice Center for advocacy and other services through VIP-EEE. A peer-reviewed study by Dr. Thomas K. Duncan and other trauma specialists was published in the Trauma Surgery & Acute Care Open, the American Association for the Surgery of Trauma's open access journal. The article discusses how partnering with Family Justice Centers can enable more services and promote better outcomes for trauma patients. Thank you to Dr. Duncan and everyone involved in the research effort! A PDF copy of this article is available on the Information and Publications tab at www.vcfjc.org.



Dr. Thomas Duncan, Ventura County Family Justice Center Foundation Vice-Chair

Benefit of Trauma Center and Family Justice Center Link



Duncan et al. TSACO 2021.

CITE: Duncan TK, Stewart R, Joseph K, et al

American Association for the Surgery of Trauma Prevention Committee review: Family Justice Centers—a not-so-novel, but unknown gem Trauma Surgery & Acute Care Open 2021;6:e000725. doi: 10.1136/tsaco-2021-000725

HEALTH ALLIANCE FOR VIOLENCE INTERVENTION

Each year, the Health Alliance for Violence Intervention (HAVI) National Conference convenes a national group of stakeholders from government, healthcare, philanthropy, and frontline violence prevention to share innovative and best practices, lessons from the field, and research on violence intervention, healing equity, and community partnerships. The 2021 theme, Forging a New Era of Equity, honored the service of frontline violence intervention workers, health professionals, and community leaders dedicated to racial and health equity and serving survivors of violence and supporting their path towards healing and transformation.



2021 HAVI Conference, workshop discussing Intersection of Violence Intervention Program with a Family Justice Center Model featuring panelists (left to right): Dr. Thomas Duncan, Trauma Medical Director of the Ventura County Medical Center; Caitlin Johnson, Senior Victim Advocate with the Ventura County District Attorney's Office and Heather Abbott-Gonzalez, VOICES of Ventura County

NOTABLES

LEGISLATIVE EFFORTS

In 2018, Assemblymember Tim Grayson (D-14) led the way in securing \$10 million from the California Office of Emergency Services for California Family Justice Centers. As a result, the District Attorney's Office received a \$400,000 allocation of these funds for a two-year period to help establish the Family Justice Center located in Ventura.

With ongoing support from Assemblymember Grayson and Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin, the District Attorney's Office will receive \$338,000 and \$1 million respectively to improve services at the Family Justice Center in Ventura and develop a Family Justice Center satellite office in Oxnard in 2022.

The Ventura County Family Justice Center in conjunction with the Alliance for HOPE International played key roles in the development of the California Family Justice Network (CFJN), which currently counts 24 of the Family Justice Centers across the state as members. The goals of the CFJN include providing training, statewide coordination of services, promoting best practices, and advocating for survivors through responsible state and federal legislation.



Family Justice Center directors from California convening at the Ventura County Family Justice Center to form a statewide network



Left to right: Kim Goldberg-Roth, Executive Director of Strength United in Northridge; Tim Grayson, Assemblymember, 14th District; Susun Kim, Executive Director of Contra Costa Family Justice Center and Mike Jump, Ventura County Chief Deputy District Attorney in state Capital Assembly Chambers



2020 District Attorneys and Directors from across California meeting at the Family Justice Center Legistlative Day in the State Capital

NOTABLES

MURAL PROJECT

In March 2021, young people from our Camp HOPE America-Ventura County program created a mural at the Family Justice Center. Artist Megan Sullivan designed this mural of sunshine with the kids and helped them create it with their personal creations. We thank Ms. Sullivan and the Westlake Women's Club for sponsoring this project. We are also grateful for the adults and mentors who support our youth program events.



Artist Megan Sullivan speaking with District Attorney Erik Nasarenko

NOTABLES

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Oxnard Police Detective Lucy Buttell Simi Valley Police Detective Kellyn King Simi Valley Police Detective Kellyn King and Oxnard Police Detective Lucy Buttell are fierce advocates for victims of crime. We are grateful for their contributions to the development of the Emergency Protective Order Program and continue to be instrumental to the program's on-going success.

VENTURA COUNTY FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER FOUNDATION

The Ventura County Family Justice Center is a vital and essential service for victims in our community. The Ventura County Family Justice Center Foundation is proud to be supporting the Center and all its staff, supporting organizations and volunteers."

- Chair Joseph L. Strohman, Esq.



Chair Joe Strohman



Vice-Chair Dr. Thomas Duncan



Secretary Dr. Irene Pinkard



Treasurer Billie Jo Rodriguez



Board Member Dianne McKay



Board Member Anthony Mireles



Board Member Armando Lopez



Board Member Chris Cuilty



Board Member Trevor Zierhut

RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION

Working with Dr. Thomas K. Duncan's trauma team at the Ventura County Medical Center, we began collecting important data elements in our intake packets in February 2020. These additional elements include:

- » If medical treatment was sought, and if so, the type and frequency of medical treatment and ER visits.
- » If medical insurance is available or if the client is Medi-Cal eligible.
- » The ages of the clients' minor children.
- » Information regarding the offender and the offender's prior criminal history and gang affiliations.

The Ventura Council of Governments funded a research study produced by a team from California Lutheran University and CSU Channel Islands, When Home is Not a Safe Haven: Domestic Violence in the Wake of COVID-19 and an Acute Needs Assessment of the Ventura County Family Justice Center. We thank Dr. Molly George, Dr. Leslie Abell, Dr. Jamshid Damooei, and everyone involved for their efforts. A PDF copy of this article is available on the Information and Publications tab at www.vcfjc.org.

GOALS FOR 2022 AND 2023

- » Dashboard development for data collection/build out of case management system through HOPE Tech Suite
- » Partnership with Ventura County Community Foundation addition of four pallet shelters to be assembled on site for emergency housing needs of our clients
- » Resurfacing of the driveway and parking lot
- » Oxnard Family Justice Center satellite
- » Upgrading security at all facilities

BY THE NUMBERS



PARTNERS



In addition to the on-site services provided at the Center, many advocacy and social service organizations are available by referral. These partners include: First 5, Give an Hour[®], NAMI, Gabriel's House, City Impact, Mixteco Indígena Community Organizing Project (MICOP), Líderes Campesinas of California, Tri-County GLAD, Youth With A Mission, Ventura County Behavioral Health, the Christina Grimmie Foundation, and others.

VENTURA COUNTY Family Justice Center

Help & **HOPE** Ayuda y **ESPERANZA**

At the Ventura County Family Justice Center, we work to improve the lives of those impacted by domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, elder and dependent adult abuse, human trafficking and other violent crimes.

En el Ventura County Family Justice Center, trabajamos para mejorar las vidas de las personas afectadas por violencia doméstica, asalto sexual, abuso infantil, abuso de ancianos y adultos dependientes, tráfico de personas y otros crímenes violentos.

AVAILABLE SERVICES

- Victim advocacy
- Emergency assistance
- Restraining order assistance
- Safety services
- Shelter and housing assistance
- Civil legal services
- Mental health services
- Spiritual support
- Financial counseling
- Education
- Child development

SERVICIOS DISPONIBLES

- Intercesión por la víctima
- Asistencia de emergencia
- Ayuda con órdenes de restricción
- Servicios de seguridad
- Refugio y asistencia de vivienda
- Servicios jurídicos civiles
- Servicios de salud mental
- Apoyo espiritual
- Asesoramiento financiero
- Educación
- Desarrollo infantil



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If you or someone you know needs assistance, please connect with us for more information.