

CORA Expands Legal Services

Collaboration means more help for victims of domestic violence

CORA has expanded its legal-services department, thanks to a grant from the US Department of Justice (DOJ).

Due to budget cuts, CORA's legal department had been downsized from four attorneys to one attorney and one legal advocate. So Supervising Attorney Jessica Dayton was especially receptive when she was approached about applying for a Community-Defined Solutions Grant from the DOJ. Together with the Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County (LASSMC), Bay Area Legal Aid (BALA), the San Mateo County Sheriff's Department, the District Attorney's Office, the Probation Department and

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the DA's Victims' Center, CORA submitted a winning joint application with the theme of “enhancing victim safety and increasing batterer accountability.”

“It was the most collaborative experience I've ever had,” Dayton says. “Part of the organizations' memorandum of understanding is a web of cross-referrals, which will help all the organizations work together for the benefit of our constituents. While CORA focuses primarily on the civil legal system, this collaboration helps bridge the gap between the civil and criminal legal systems for our clients.”

The organizations are indeed interconnected. CORA receives many referrals through BALA's Restraining Order Clinic, which also received funding from the grant. BALA, LASSMC and CORA started the domestic violence pro bono collaborative, which recruits, trains and mentors pro bono attorneys to represent victims. The Sheriff's Department had been forced to disband its Firearms Compliance Unit, which did searches and enforcement to ensure those with restraining orders against them did not possess firearms. This

grant enabled them to re-form the unit, which plays a major role in keeping victims of domestic violence — CORA's clients — safer.

Internally, the grant let CORA add an additional half-time staff attorney and a legal advocate. In the month and a half since she started, attorney Elena Gil has already taken on more than six cases; those clients would not have had legal representation without that funding. Lalo Legaspi, CORA's

legal-services advocate, accompanies victims to court and helps them with paperwork and preparation. Both employees are bilingual, which is essential in working with severely

underserved populations in San Mateo County.

“Access to legal representation is a huge marker for victim safety,” Dayton says. “The more people we have doing this work, the more people we can serve. We're still not meeting the total need, but the funding from this grant brings us closer.”

Community-Defined Solutions Grants are awarded by the Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women to organizations or groups of organizations “working to establish or improve a coordinated criminal justice response to domestic violence cases. These funds support efforts by prosecutors, probation officers, law enforcement agencies, advocates and the courts to enhance victim safety and offender accountability.”

“The experience of working with all these different entities is hugely positive,” Dayton says. “We have different roles, and we have different jobs, and we may have different philosophies, but ultimately we all care about the victim's safety. This collaboration lets us work together more effectively toward that common goal.”

CLIENT SUCCESS STORY

The South San Francisco Police Department referred Laura (not her real name) to CORA's Emergency Response Program, but she declined services. When her batterer took her to court seeking sole legal and physical custody of their four-year-old, she remembered the police officer in South San Francisco who referred her to CORA. This time, when Laura contacted CORA, she was ready for help. Laura's case manager sought assistance from CORA's legal department, which answered her questions, referred her to an attorney and consulted with her attorney throughout the case. It took her four court appointments, two mediations and nine months to disprove her husband's accusations and gain legal custody of her child.

Laura is now living in a safe environment with her son and mother in South San Francisco.



Message from Melissa



Melissa Lukin
Executive Director

One cannot be associated with CORA and not believe in miracles. While the past couple of years have been among the most challenging in our more-than-30-year history, requiring significant reductions in staff, we have actually responded to nearly 30 percent more calls and helped thousands of brave members of our community create miracles for themselves and their children. Credit goes to CORA staff, of course, who have responded by doing whatever it takes to serve our clients well. But the dedication and commitment of all our friends and supporters is what makes our work possible.

Generous foundations and donors, as well as public institutions such as the Department of Justice and the California Department of Emergency Management Services, have helped fill our funding gaps. Such assistance has enabled us to maintain and even expand our legal, shelter and mental-health services. The local community rallied, too, turning out in record numbers to help families in need through our Adopt-A-Family program.

The most notable miracles, however, are those of our clients. I am continually humbled by the tenacity of the human spirit, the courage and persistence of those who have a kernel of hope and make the call for help.

The past year has been a year of miracles: From 33 miners who kept the faith deep in underground darkness, to protestors in the Middle East who fought for freedom after years of oppression, to the Japanese facing the aftermath of one of the worst natural disasters in recorded history — none of these people had any reason to have hope, to believe in new possibilities. Much like our clients, who persist with support groups, court dates, housing searches and finding new schools for their children, they made a decision based on some glimmer of hope, to dedicate themselves to making their own miracles come true. Thank you to those of you who have contributed to their success.

Hope to see you at Spring Awakening on May 5!

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Pass the Remote

New remote referral system for law enforcement, by law enforcement

With an enormous amount of paperwork — up to eight different forms — the system for referring victims of domestic violence to CORA was frustrating and complicated for law-enforcement officers. Further, the multiple-step voice-mail system where the officer had to leave a message for a CORA counselor was time-consuming and confusing.

After receiving this feedback from the officers she was charged with training, Judy King, CORA's Emergency Response Program community liaison, worked directly with officers to develop a user-friendly referral system they could easily utilize directly from their patrol cars before driving away from the scene of a domestic-violence incident.

Including all 22 law-enforcement agencies in San Mateo County presented a challenge, in that remote capabilities and computerized

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systems differed from department to department. King discovered they all have access to LАWNET, the official San Mateo County law-enforcement portal, so she set up a secure form within LАWNET. Officers can access that referral page right from their car, reducing a paper-intensive process that could take 20 minutes or more, to an electronic referral

form they can complete in about one minute.

“The whole process is officer-driven,” King says. “From getting rid of the paper system, to taking advantage of technology, to including fields for the type of information they need and want to provide, we have worked hand in hand with officers every step of the way to make this a success.”

And a success it is. In the three cities that served as beta testers, referrals to CORA increased exponentially, and officer feedback was incorporated into the final system. The new system has been approved to go county-wide; King has begun training and hopes full implementation will be complete by early summer.



BY THE NUMBERS



5,081
calls were answered on our 24-hour Crisis Hotline in 2010



200+
individuals were housed in our emergency shelter and transitional housing in 2010



4,000
people were provided with individual counseling and support groups in 2010

CORA provides free and confidential services to victims and survivors of domestic/dating violence and abuse, including child and teen witnesses, in San Mateo County.

CORA is committed to serving the unique needs of each individual family and community.

24-hour hotline: 800-300-1080
website: www.corasupport.org

Adopt-A-Family Turns Four

CORA, community, students brighten season for families in need

She made beautiful, intricate handmade ornaments. For years, they'd hung them around the house in December. This year, her daughter asked, again, if they could have a Christmas tree on which to hang them. Sadly, she responded, again, she didn't think so.

But they *did* have a tree. And the ornaments looked perfectly glorious hanging in their rightful place — thanks to CORA's Adopt-A-Family holiday-gift program.

In its fourth year, the program served a record 146 family units. Client families filled out a gift-request form and gave it to their case workers. The CORA staff matched clients with donors who made their holiday-gift wish come true.

This year, an extra element was added to the program: In addition to the requested gift, donors were asked to provide a family gift card so the parent could shop for any additional needs the family had.

“The gift cards help empower the parent to make decisions on behalf of their families,” says Jannifer Lesuma, CORA's Adopt-A-Family coordinator. “Many times, they are not given choices in the unhealthy relationships they've experienced. We try to give them the opportunity to make choices whenever possible.”

“Being in development, we don't have a lot of direct client interaction. Through Adopt-A-Family, we got to speak to clients when they picked up their gifts,” Lesuma says, adding that the ornament-maker was in tears when she came to pick up the tree she had requested on her form. “She told me she appreciates that CORA takes care of more than just the immediate physical danger clients may be in — that we help them prepare for a better life and show them they are worth more than what they've been treated like in the past. It was very emotional.”

“For many of our clients, this is the only gift they will get. It's a positive and empowering experience for clients,” Lesuma says. “It's also a joyous experience for staff and donors.”

The program is multicultural and inclusive, with a host of donors, from members of Shalom Bayit, who brought Chanukah gifts for Jewish families, to



Top: Burlingame High School students Bridget Reyes (left) and Bekah Miller made Adopt-A-Family a school service project. Bottom: Women of Stanford Law members Marian Fielding (front) and Ellie Dehghan encouraged other Stanford students to donate gifts.

the WestEd agency to MetLife Investments to Stanford Law School students and many others.

This year, students from Burlingame High School got particularly involved, adopting families and raising more than \$4,000. Senior Bekah Miller, who serves as the school's service learning commissioner and plans its fund-raisers, had adopted CORA families in the past with her own family. She contacted CORA and worked to make Adopt-A-Family a service project for the school. Students wound up helping eight families, including the one that asked for a Christmas tree.

“The experience made me realize how fortunate I am for everything I have,” Miller says. “And it made me realize how many thousands of people in my own community don't have enough. The things the families ask for are basic things everyone takes for granted every day — the kids asked for jackets or shoes. I was so happy I could help them.”

Treating Trauma

CORA staff undergoes advanced training

CORA mental-health staff and interns are participating in advanced trauma-treatment training called EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing). EMDR is an evidence-based psychotherapy approach for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which uses various procedures and protocols, including eye movements, tones or taps, to help clients reprocess past memories, present triggers or anticipated future experiences while simultaneously focusing on a set of external stimuli. Clients generally experience insight, changes in memories or new associations that help them manage their stress.

According to Cori Manthorne, CORA's director of programs, very few therapists are qualified to do work in this area. “Through this program, our clinicians are getting advanced trauma-treatment training,” she says. “They are getting a rare opportunity, and we're able to provide this specialty in our repertoire of services.” Two staff members and two interns are participating in the intensive training, thanks to a grant from the Sequoia Healthcare District.

EMDR has been shown to be an effective treatment in dealing with PTSD. It lets clinicians treat patients more quickly and teaches patients how to manage stressors themselves, potentially increasing the number of people CORA can help.

In addition to providing a tremendous client benefit, this type of training is very valuable to CORA's MFT (marriage and family therapy) interns, offering a rare skill for them to add to their licensure training at CORA. Manthorne notes that CORA is currently seeking another bilingual MFT intern who would also receive advanced training in trauma treatment.

“EMDR is as advanced a trauma training as you can get, and, as far as I know, we are the only clinicians who will provide this therapy at no charge,” Manthorne says. “We are very fortunate to be able to work with our clients in this type of modality, and we look forward to utilizing it for their benefit.”



Legislative Day in Sacramento

Representatives from all 99 California domestic-violence shelters that receive state funding participated in a Legislative Action Day in Sacramento on March 7. CORA Executive Director Melissa Lukin (center) met with Assemblymember Fiona Ma (third from right) and other lawmakers to thank them and educate them about the Teen Dating Violence Prevention Education Act (AB 1373).



Latus Lends a Helping Hand

Janine Latus, author of *If I Am Missing or Dead: A Sister's Story of Love, Murder and Liberation*, a *New York Times* and *Sunday Times of London* bestseller, was the keynote speaker at the CORA 2010 Helping Hands Breakfast on Oct. 21, 2010. The event honored the agency's law-enforcement partners.

Latus signed copies and read an excerpt of her book, which is her own story of abuse and empowerment, as well as a cautionary tale about the murder of her younger sister at the hands of a live-in boyfriend.

“Nearly four women are murdered by former or current husbands or boyfriends every day. Sadly, Janine Latus has lived those statistics. While she survived her years of abuse, her beautiful sister did not,” CORA Executive Director Melissa Lukin says. “Latus' book also illustrates the importance of asking — and accepting — help from others. She helped us both commemorate Domestic Violence Awareness Month and show our appreciation to those whose work helps CORA save lives.”

CLIENT SUCCESS STORY

Before calling CORA's hotline, Rachel (not her real name) had attempted to leave her marriage twice but was unsuccessful. After calling CORA, Rachel received domestic violence counseling, education and case-management services. Through counseling, she identified the pattern of abuse in her relationship and, through a safety-planning process, safely and successfully left her abusive husband. With the assistance of her CORA case manager, Rachel was able to file a good-cause report in court, which enabled her to leave with her three children free of legal repercussions.

One major obstacle to Rachel's ability to leave her abusive relationship was her financial dependence. Her case manager helped her meet her goal of going back to school and referred her to Peninsula Works, where she received assistance in securing employment.

Rachel is now in a stable living situation with her children, free from abuse.

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Where is the Love? Right Here

Women of Stanford Law (WSL), a group of Stanford Law School students, chose CORA as its community-service partner. In addition to participating in the Adopt-A-Family program and planning a hands-on service project for later this spring, WSL held a “Love Drive” this past Valentine’s Day. Group members set up a table with craft supplies in the law library and encouraged passersby to make two cards: one for a loved one and one for a family that had experienced domestic violence. More than 100 valentines were created for CORA clients.

“We wanted to show people they can give back in many ways,” says WSL community-service chair Ellie Dehghan. “You don’t need to give that much money or that much time to make a difference.”

Child Watch Breaks Barriers

For many CORA clients, finding child care is one of the biggest barriers to accessing treatment and services. In response to this need, CORA has been working to increase services for children in its housing department and across the agency.

One such effort is Child Watch, which began in January 2011 to work with children in the CORA community office, transitional housing and shelter, while their parents participate in support groups, attend treatment appointments, make court appearances, etc.

In addition to allowing parents to attend to their own needs, the program attends to the specific needs of children of domestic violence. Often considered “hidden victims,” because they may not be the direct recipients of the abuse, these children are often traumatized and need specialized attention and care. Through Child Watch, they engage in age-appropriate activities, such as arts, crafts, reading, games, dance and field trips (see “To the Exploratorium,” below), with trained staff to help them deal with their own issues. Child-activity specialists conduct assessments of their developmental needs and progress, and work with both children and parents to manage the recovery process.

The program was started with temporary funding from the California Office of Emergency Services, which will fund the program through June 2011. “Child Watch is already a success, with 40 children participating in January and February alone,” says Cori Manthorne, CORA’s director of programs. “We are currently seeking permanent funding to continue this essential program for CORA families.”



To the Exploratorium

Participants in CORA’s Child Watch program visited the Exploratorium in San Francisco this past January. The interactive museum hosted six kids and a mom, as well as CORA staff, who used the field trip as a teaching experience for all participants.

“The kids loved getting out of the shelter, and we hope this is just the first of many field trips,” says Steve Anderson, CORA’s manager of housing services. A trip to Riley’s Place in Woodside, Calif., which encourages children’s interaction with animals, is planned for April 30.

No Size Fits All

Shelter adjusts to client needs

Some rules were meant to be broken. For CORA’s shelter for victims of domestic violence, that saying is now the rule.

According to Steve Anderson, CORA’s manager of housing services, several events in recent months have illustrated how responsive CORA is to the changing needs of its clients.

A woman would not leave an abusive situation without her beloved dog, but CORA did not accept animals. “We realized it’s not in anyone’s best interest to turn away this woman and her dog. Who would that help?” Anderson says. CORA now allows therapy pets and registered companion animals in the shelter.

“We got a call from a shelter in New Mexico about a woman with a 19-year-old son. Since the son had not been a direct victim of violence, no nearby shelter would accept him, and his mother wouldn’t leave without him,” Anderson says. “Our policy of not allowing non-victim children over 18 wasn’t helping anyone, so we welcomed this family.”

It’s part of a decided effort to shape services to respond to client needs. “We don’t want to be another dominant, controlling force in their lives and tell them they must conform to a strict set of arbitrary rules,” Anderson says. “We want to empower them to reclaim their lives.

“Instead of trying to make our clients fit to us, we want to fit to our clients. We ask, ‘What is possible?’ *not* ‘What is permitted?’” Anderson says. “As long as it’s safe for the clients, the shelter and the community, we look at our practices on a case-by-case basis. It lets us have a more inclusive, open environment and really meet the needs of all our clients, no matter their situation.”



Community Overcoming
Relationship Abuse

P.O. Box 4245
Burlingame, CA 94011
Business Line: 650-652-0800

24-hour hotline: 800-300-1080

www.corasupport.org

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Join us for
Spring Awakening

*A benefit to celebrate
our accomplishments and honor
Sequoia Healthcare District
as our 2011 community partner*

Thursday, May 5, 2011

6:00–9:00 pm

**Menlo Circus Club
Atherton, Calif.**

The evening will include a silent auction,
entertainment and a buffet dinner.

Look for your invitation soon!

For information, call **650.777.9859**,
or visit **www.corasupport.org**

