INTRODUCTION

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Zero Tolerance for Domestic Violence, an initiative of the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors, is a public/private partnership designed to reduce domestic violence, sexual assault, elder abuse, and human trafficking by interrupting the generational, traumatic, and progressive cycle of violence. Authorized as the first Zero Tolerance for Domestic Violence County in the State of California, Contra Costa continues to successfully implement a coordinated approach characterized by:

- Efficient system improvements
- Accountability for results
- Policy and practice changes
- Investment by stakeholders and outside funders
- Strong public/private partnerships

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

In February 2000, the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors declared that the county would have "zero tolerance for domestic violence." In 2001, it launched the Zero Tolerance for Domestic Violence Initiative (*Zero Tolerance*), a multi-agency system improvement effort, providing funding and establishing accountability criteria for a variety of supports and services. At the same time the Board sought legislative authorization for oversight of systems change efforts.

SB 425 (Torlakson), the Zero Tolerance for Domestic Violence Act, authorized a five year pilot program in Contra Costa County. In 2006, the County reported to the California State Legislature on the significant progress made possible by the pilot program. The legislature's response was permanent authorization of the Zero Tolerance for Domestic Violence Act under SB 968 (Torlakson), which mandates a multi-faceted, multi-sectorial, and coordinated approach to domestic violence.

Zero Tolerance (ZT) facilitates, coordinates, and incubates improved service delivery systems and policy development. The overarching goals of the ZT initiative are to bring about improved efficiency and coordination of system response, improved responsiveness to clients' needs, and increased access to funding. The ZT theory of change includes the assumptions that:

- Early and strong intervention with perpetrators of misdemeanor domestic violence (DV) offenses prevents the escalation of violence to felony-level crimes.
- Increased perpetrator accountability and education will lead to lower recidivism and a safer community.

BUILDING POWERFUL ALLIANCES ACROSS DISCIPLINES

Zero Tolerance functions on the principle that no one entity can do it alone, placing an emphasis on public systems and private providers working and advocating together to leverage all resources and deliver effective changes to systems with which families interact.

Public Partners:

- Antioch Unified School District
- Employment and Human Services Department
- Health Services Department
- District Attorney's Office
- Police Departments
- Probation Department
- Public Defender's Office
- Superior Court of California, County of Contra Costa

Community-based Partners:

- Bay Area Legal Aid (Bay Legal)
- Child Abuse Prevention Council of Contra Costa
- Community Violence Solutions (CVS)
- First 5 Contra Costa
- STAND! For Families Free of Violence (STAND!)
- Youth Intervention Network
- We Care Services for Children

PROJECTS

"We have significantly improved the awareness of law enforcement around DV issues. We have facilitated training and provided extensive resources that are used by law enforcement, as well as aided in the development of protocols for best practices among multiple partners in the criminal justice field."
– Law Enforcement Partner

- A client-centered system will increase DV survivors' ability to build safe and successful lives for themselves and their children.
- Coordinated efforts of partnering agencies will lead to the broader community learning that violence is not tolerable and break the intergenerational cycle of violence.

The primary ZT projects designed to bring about the initiative's outcomes are:

- **Anti-Human Trafficking Coalition:** Working to raise awareness about the impact of human trafficking, build capacity among public and private agencies to reach out to victims who are being trafficked and provide access to services, and to develop coordinated services, policies, and protocols. A multidisciplinary coalition meets quarterly.
- **Criminal Justice Training and Materials:** A partnership of criminal justice, social service, and community agencies in Contra Costa is delivering interactive training and materials to criminal justice agencies spanning the issues of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and elder abuse.
- **Domestic Violence Court:** A post-conviction misdemeanor domestic violence court works to interrupt the escalation of violence in abusive relationships. Through coordination among multiple agencies, DV Court includes a specialized calendar, probation supervision, and access to victim services.
- **Families Thrive** (formerly Safe and Bright Futures) brings together organizations in the community to marshal resources and support partnerships to address the needs of children, youth and families impacted by domestic violence. http://www.familiesthrive.org.
- **Internal and Cross-agency Policies, Procedures, and Practices:** By bringing multiple agencies to the table, the initiative creates opportunities for professionals to communicate and understand each other's functions and roles, learn about effective and promising approaches, and develop improved systemic responses. For instance, co-locating advocates in police departments, CALWORKS offices, and health clinics raises awareness and institutionalizes new practices. A significant effort to develop countywide high-risk assessment protocols in domestic violence cases and a high-risk team case review is currently underway.
- **Preventing Violence Before It Begins (DELTA Project):** Through community action teams, raising public awareness, training, and an annual Men of Merit event, the project engages men as agents of change, recognizing that men must be leaders in the struggle to prevent violence.
- **Restraining Order Clinics:** BayLegal, in partnership with the Superior Court and STAND!, provides countywide clinics assisting litigants in preparing restraining orders, providing information about domestic violence, and linking them to important community resources.

(Projects continue on following page.)

"We are a type of incubator for important best practices, pilot projects, and new things associated with DV."

– Criminal Justice partner agency

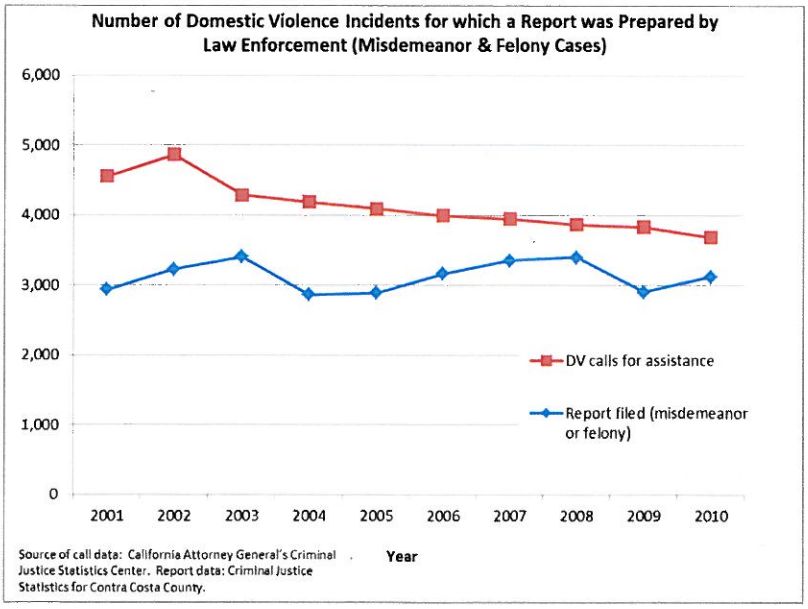
- **Safe for Us Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange:** The Safe for Us Visitation and Exchange center, operated by CVS, offers safe parent/child visitation and exchange services for children and their families who have experienced domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and child abuse. The program's mission is to decrease childhood exposure to violence, increase safety of child and adult victims, and build healthy family relationships.
- **West Contra Costa Family Justice Center (WCCFJC):** A collaborative multi-service center for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, elder abuse, stalking, and human trafficking, and their families. Identified as a best practice by the United States Department of Justice, the WCCFJC provides advocacy, access to counseling and mental health, assistance with emergency shelter, safety planning, law enforcement assistance, civil legal assistance (restraining orders, custody, and dissolution), court accompaniment, and access to the Victim Assistance Program.

INCREASING PERPETRATOR ACCOUNTABILITY: A COORDINATED CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESPONSE

An important component of improving the system response is building the capacity of the criminal justice system to hold perpetrators of violence accountable, thereby increasing safety for victims. Strategies include: Misdemeanor Domestic Violence Court • Specialized investigation, vertical prosecution, and probation supervision • Co-located advocates • Restraining order clinics • Training for law enforcement personnel.

Early intervention has improved.

ZT partners seek to **intervene early and strongly** with perpetrators of misdemeanor domestic violence offenses **to prevent the escalation of violence** to felony-level crimes. The first sign that this is occurring is the increase in percentage of DV calls for assistance that result in police reports being filed. A training regarding domestic violence, developed and delivered by a multi-disciplinary ZT team for law enforcement jurisdictions, helped to improve the way responding officers assessed and documented the dynamics of each scene, as compared with the way this was done prior to the ZT initiative. A greater proportion of calls for assistance now result in a report being written by responding officers. Therefore, while the number of DV calls for assistance has decreased since 2001, the



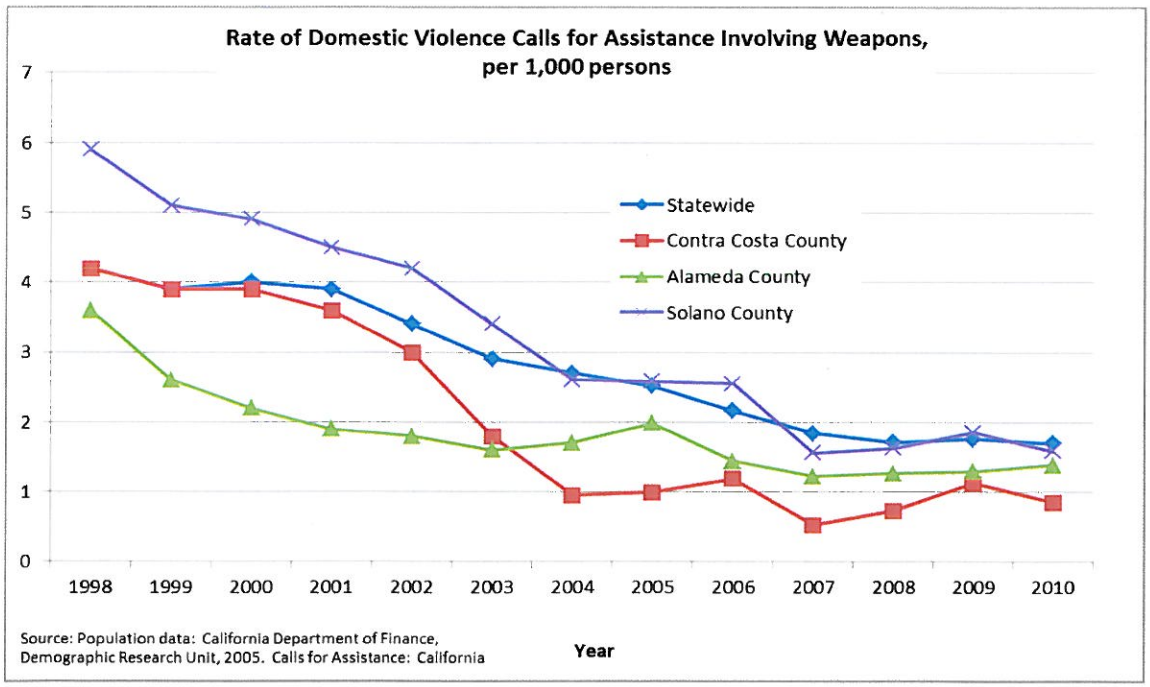
"The success of our work through the Domestic Violence Court (sic) is something that the County should consider to be an accomplishment."

– Probation Department Partner

number of police reports completed for misdemeanor and felony-level incidents has increased. In 2001, law enforcement reports were prepared for 64% of calls. The proportion has never been that low in the subsequent years. In 2010, 85% of calls resulted in reports being prepared.

The ZT theory of change includes the assumption that intervening swiftly and effectively in a misdemeanor case prevents a future felony. The number of misdemeanor reports to law enforcement shows an upward trend since 1999, while the number of felony reports shows a downward trend. In 2000, 28% of all reports were felony reports. In the 10 years of ZT, that number has never exceeded 22%, and in 2011, only 13% of all reports were felony reports.

If early intervention prevents further incidences of domestic violence (e.g. those involving weapons), then data obtained on calls where weapons are present may serve as an *impact measure* of the ZT initiative. As the chart below shows, the rate of calls per 1,000 people in California, Contra Costa, and two nearby counties have all declined since 1998. However, since 2004, the rate of calls involving weapons has been lowest in Contra Costa County. Consistently lower rates in the county over a period of seven years point to ZT's impact on awareness, early intervention, and overall system responsiveness.



Despite this encouraging trend, local data compiled by ZT partner STAND! on homicides in Contra Costa County with DV as a factor show an increase from five in 2007 to 10 in 2011. Although it is possible that this reflects greater lethality in DV cases, it is also possible that a shift in community norms may be taking place, resulting in awareness and/or reporting of DV as a factor during an investigation about a homicide. Data specific to the percentage of

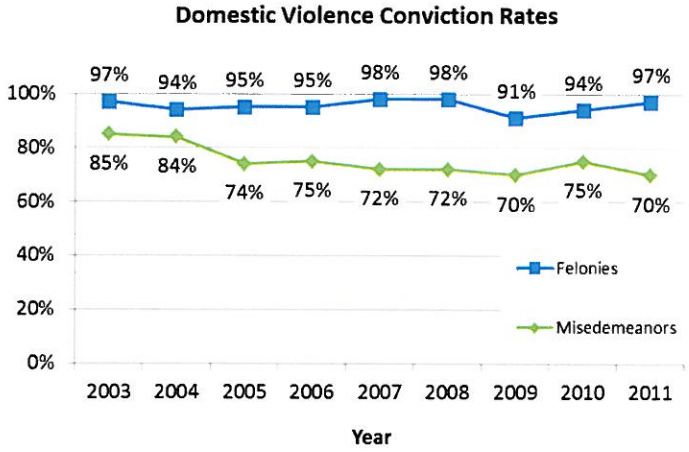
homicides in Contra Costa County with DV as a factor is currently unavailable. This information would sharpen an analysis on whether there is a correlation between early intervention, the reduction of calls with weapons, and reduced lethality. Ensuring that the County's multi-agency DV Death Review Team has the capacity and personnel to track and report this data and compare it with neighboring counties and the state as a whole would help to determine ZT's impact in reducing the level of violence and lethality.

Increasing accountability leads to a safer community.

Zero Tolerance partners conduct multidisciplinary trainings to build system responsiveness to domestic violence. DV Coordinators with the District Attorney's office conduct training seminars for local police agencies on the investigation and reporting of DV and for misdemeanor attorneys on all aspects of trials specific to DV cases, including the type of evidence to obtain in domestic violence and elder abuse reports that will aid in prosecution. The DA's specialized felony DV unit ensures that a single prosecutor is assigned to each DV case — a system of "vertical prosecution," which allows the attorney to become intimately aware of issues of the case and helps build victim confidence and trust.[1]

Over time, a higher trial conviction rate may indicate improved law enforcement practices that lead to effective early intervention and increased perpetrator accountability and/or a desired shift in societal norms that impacts jurors' perceptions of DV and elder abuse cases.

The conviction rates for DV cases closed each year in Contra Costa County have remained high since 2003 (the earliest year data for which data are currently available): Over 90% for felonies and 70% or higher for misdemeanors. Elder abuse felony convictions were at 100% in 2011, up from 89% in 2007.



Source: Contra Costa County District Attorney

Steps to reduce recidivism are in place.

The Misdemeanor Domestic Violence Court, along with deputy probation officers, is responsible for supervising misdemeanor DV offenders. Probation officers provide intensive supervision and act expeditiously when probationers are in non-compliance with their probation conditions and bring them before the court for immediate sanctions whenever possible. Perpetrator accountability reduces the recidivism that brings such cases back to the system as felony level offenses. In addition, Probation closely supervises DV felony perpetrators throughout the county.

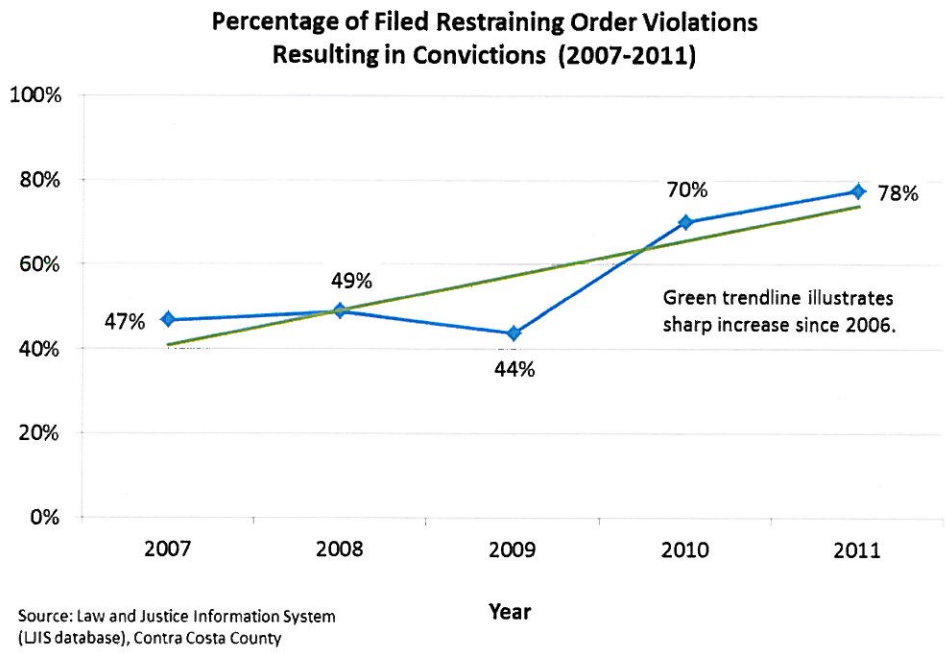
[1] In the DA's specialized felony domestic violence unit, a single prosecutor is assigned to each case and is responsible for making all court appearances from the initial charging of the case to the final disposition.

"The services helped me understand what my options are and where I can get help."

– DV survivor attending Restraining Order Clinic

Increased awareness about the importance of keeping victims and their children safe by preventing additional violence has led to a significant increase in the percentage of **restraining order** violations that have resulted in convictions over the past five years (for which full-year data is available), from 47% in 2007 to 78% in 2011.

According to the ZT theory of change, increased perpetrator accountability also includes an acknowledgement of negative patterns and acquisition of better conflict resolution skills. Therefore, a critical component of the system is treatment for offenders to help them change their behavior. According to client satisfaction surveys almost all perpetrators who received mandatory referral to a Batterer's Intervention Program (BIP) since 2009 report that the treatment they received was helpful.[2]



[2] However, there are ongoing gaps in establishing consistent standards and accountability for delivery of BIP treatment, and a lack data on whether perpetrators are completing BIP and what affect BIP has on violent behavior over time.

RESPONSIVENESS TO CLIENTS

DEVELOPING CLIENT-CENTERED SERVICES

Coordinating and fostering innovative system responses to intervene in and prevent violence lies at the heart of Zero Tolerance's work. This approach necessitates a shift from traditional agency-centered models to a more client-centered, integrated model.

Co-location of services better meets survivors' needs.

A cornerstone of collaboration among Zero Tolerance partners has been the co-location of services among public and private agencies. Examples include co-located domestic violence and sexual assault advocates in police departments; co-location of advocates in CalWORKs offices, domestic violence court, restraining order clinics, the district attorney's office, and health clinics. Among the many positive results of co-location are that families participating in CalWORKs are more aware of their ability to request DV services, when DV is a barrier to meeting Welfare To Work participation requirements; and police departments are conducting more effective investigations, leading to improved DV conviction rates.

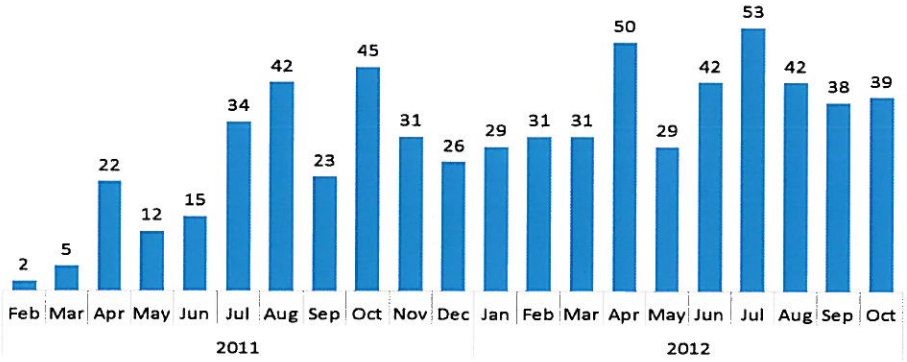
Building on this foundation of successful co-location, Zero Tolerance partners embarked on an effort to integrate services through the Family Justice Center model. When the West Contra Costa **Family Justice Center (FJC)** opened its doors in February 2011, it became a major step in improving responsiveness to the needs of victims of violence in the county. The FJC realigns many of the existing crisis-intervention services provided by multiple public and community based agencies, which results in better coordination, faster communication between partners, reduces the number of times survivors need to tell their story, and reduces the wait times when accessing multiple systems.

> **"The demand for services has quickly outpaced the Center's ability to provide integrated services one day a week."**
>
> *– Family Justice Center Director*

The bar chart shows the steady increase in demand for FJC services since its opening month. In exit interviews and surveys:

- 100% of clients reported that they felt respected while at the FJC.
- 88% reported that their primary presenting issue was addressed **the same day.**
- 76% said they would recommend the FJC to someone in a similar situation.

Monthly Visits to Family Justice Center (Feb. 2011-Oct. 2012)



RESPONSIVENESS TO CLIENTS

"I felt heard for the first time in a long time. It felt safe to ask questions, and I knew you would take time to explain the process to me."

"Their help made me feel calmer, without fear."

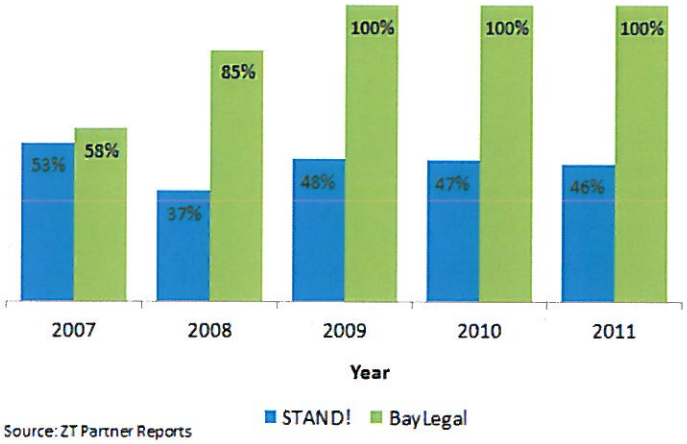
"Now I can conclude this bad chapter in my life."

– DV survivors/clients

Coordination and collaboration help clients access services.

By **coordinating efforts to connect victims of violence to resources they need**, regardless of which agency or organization they interact with first, and **by sharing information and learning with one another** Zero Tolerance partners hope that victims will have a higher level of immediate safety and stability, which in turn will promote longer-term self-reliance and safety. The accompanying chart shows that about half of STAND! clients and all or nearly all of BayLegal clients access services as a result of referrals from ZT partners. With coordination, ZT partners are able to reduce duplication of services and collectively offer more services than they could alone.

Percentage of Clients Referred from ZT Partners (2007-2011)

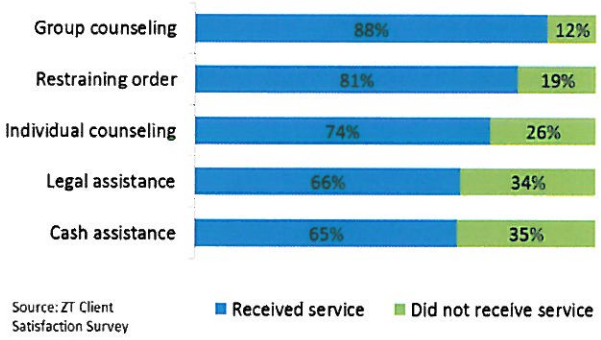


Source: ZT Partner Reports

Client satisfaction is high.

Zero Tolerance is committed to learning about client needs and satisfaction. Since 2009, data from close to 800 Client Satisfaction Surveys, completed by clients served by Zero Tolerance partners, including advocacy agencies, service providers, and legal partners, has been entered into an online collector for analysis. These surveys and the bar charts on this page show:

Percentage of Clients Who Received Services Needed (n=272 to 382)



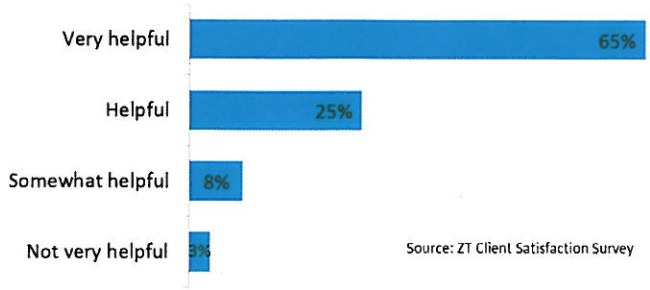
Source: ZT Client Satisfaction Survey

Top services requested are:

- group counseling
- restraining orders
- individual counseling
- other legal assistance (e.g., help filling out documents or accompaniment to court)
- cash assistance (e.g., CalWORKs)

Most clients receive the services they need. Clients requesting group or individual counseling or help with a restraining order are most likely to have their needs met. Those seeking other kinds of legal assistance or financial support are less likely to have their needs met. **However, a large majority of clients accessing services provided by ZT partners are satisfied with the help they receive.**

How helpful were the staff at helping you meet your needs? (n=330)



Source: ZT Client Satisfaction Survey

"I am going to present this information at parent meetings and pass it along to staff so we can have a better understanding of children impacted by domestic violence and therefore be able to perceive and respond to them differently."

– Head Start site supervisor

Improving Community-wide Capacity

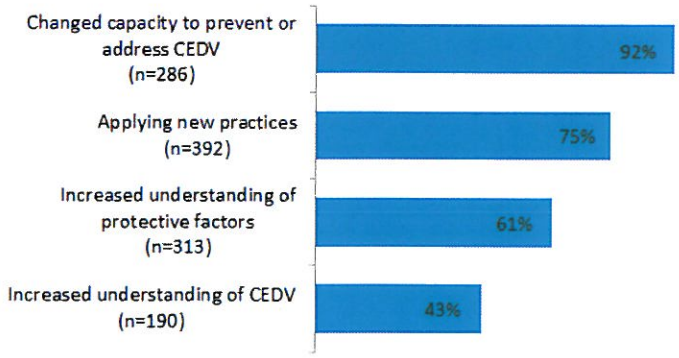
The ZT theory of change is that the coordinated efforts of partnering agencies will lead to victims and the broader community learning that violence is not tolerable. ZT's holistic and comprehensive approach to ending DV includes laying a foundation for learning that will lead to the development of a better system response in the future. ZT partners are building the capacity of multiple agencies, organizations, and first responders in the county system to intervene when violence occurs and to build awareness and the ability and commitment to help prevent it before it begins. For instance, the DELTA project of ZT partner STAND! engages men and boys in a coordinated effort to stop and prevent violence against women. ZT partners also work to help adults and children exposed to violence to build resilience in order to thrive and prevent further violence in their lives and in future generations.

Trainings and resources help practitioners address childhood exposure to domestic violence (CEDV).

Since its inception in 2009, Zero Tolerance's project Families Thrive has held in-person trainings and posted online trainings on the Learning Center of its website (www.familiesthrive.com), conducted workshops, and convened community meetings for over 3,000 community members on topics such as identifying and assessing CEDV, cultural considerations in addressing CEDV, teen dating violence, and successful communication/messaging with others about CEDV. Families Thrive has supported eight prototype projects — innovative, replicable strategies that organizations are developing to address CEDV. In addition, the participating agencies developed a system to track CEDV in the county, with the intention of increasing awareness and assisting in the development of a more responsive system.

Using multiple, interconnected strategies, Families Thrive has **strengthened the ability of agencies and practitioners to respond to and prevent CEDV,** which in turn promises to lead to healthier families and less violence in future generations. For instance, 92% of Families Thrive training participants say they have increased their capacity to prevent or address CEDV, and 75% are already applying new practices they learned.

Participation in Families Thrive led to ...



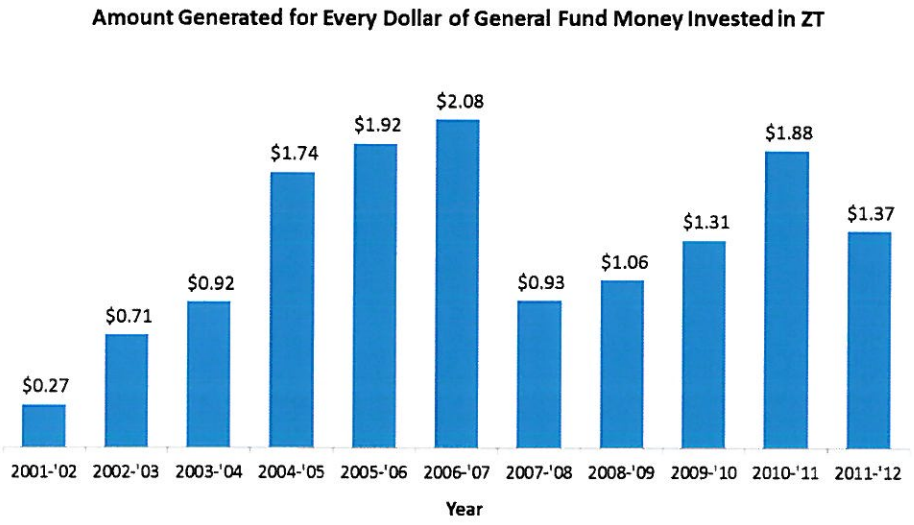
Source: Families Thrive

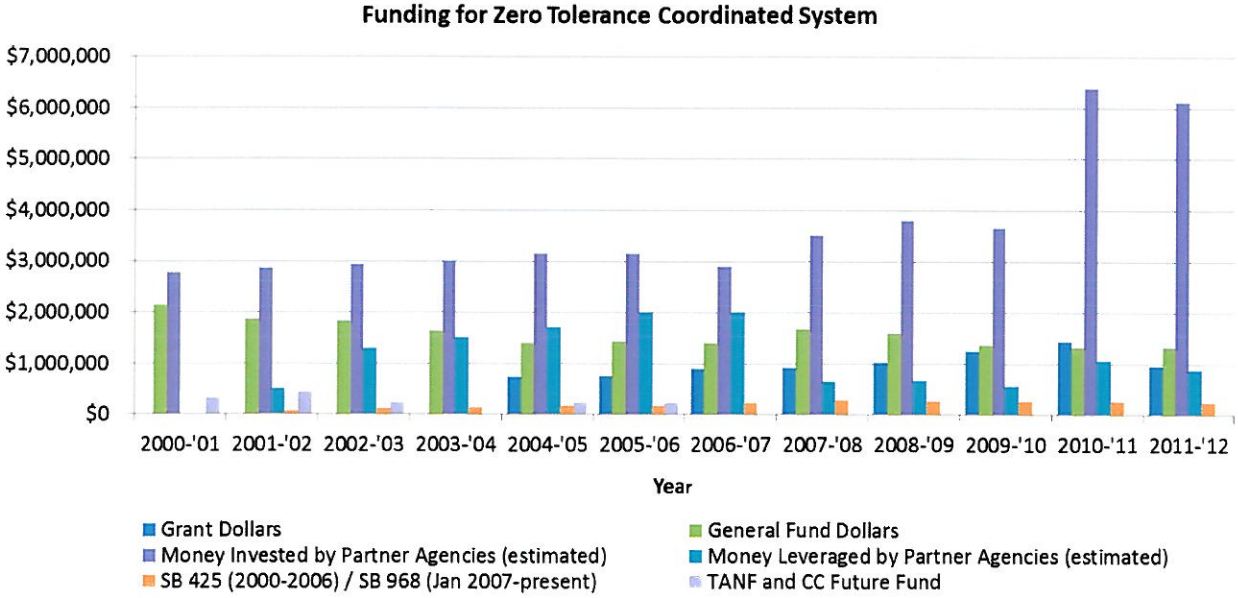
"Zero Tolerance has brought in a lot of additional revenue to this county on DV issues."

– Community-based organization partner

Return on Investment

Zero Tolerance is a catalyst for bringing new resources into Contra Costa. As the charts on this page illustrate, the return on investment in the ZT initiative is significant. The Board of Supervisors has strategically invested limited general fund dollars (at its highest, $2.1 million in 2001, and just $1.3 million this year), and county agencies and community-based organizations have invested funding for services and in-kind staffing to support system improvements. These investments have been critical in attracting close to $13 million in funding from various sources over the past 10 years.





"Congratulations to Contra Costa County .... Their efforts, combined with the efforts of their partner agencies, can help prevent domestic violence in our community."

– U.S. Congressional Representative George Miller

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Reflecting on our first 10 years, we have learned that...

- **ZT has achieved an improved system response to DV.**
  - Earlier intervention in DV, exemplified by an increase in DV-related misdemeanor and decrease in felony cases.
  - An increasing number of DV calls for which reports are submitted by law enforcement.
  - Establishment of vertical prosecution, specialized DV investigation unit(s), probation supervision, and DV Court.
- **The capacity of first responders, public agencies, and community practitioners to intervene is stronger.**
  - Trainings, workshops, and other resources for practitioners that assist in improving investigation, response, prevention, and coordination.
  - Improved policies and practices across multiple sectors.
- **The safety and needs of clients and the community are better met.**
  - Co-located and coordinated services enable survivors to receive assistance and referrals in an efficient manner.
  - Comprehensive services that go far beyond basic crisis intervention help families build safe and stable lives for themselves and their children.
  - Prevention and intervention efforts aim to reduce the harmful impact of violence on children, youth, and their families.

Zero Tolerance partners envision a future where...

Contra Costa County continues to strengthen the system response to violence by aligning policies, practices, and protocols for first responders and practitioners. Through innovative strategies, capacity building efforts, engaging key stakeholders, attracting funding and reinvestment, and implementing strong evaluation practices, ZTDV will:

- Champion and expand seamless, integrated coordination of services across, civil, criminal and juvenile justice systems to improve victim and family safety.
- Ensure effective services for all victims and their families through coordinated assessment, measurement, and evaluation.
- Advocate for appropriate and full level of funding based on true costs and evolving needs of the response system.
- Create a comprehensive and effective system of prevention that establishes Contra Costa County as a leader in promoting safe communities in California and a model for other counties in this and other states.

To realize that future, important strategic directions include…

- Expand existing effective approaches including but not limited to Domestic Violence Court; supervised visitation and exchange, advocacy, legal services and reinstatement of court-based self-help programs.
- Increase offender supervision and improve standards for batterer's treatment programs (BIP), ability to track treatment completion and outcomes in reduction or cessation of violent behavior, and address issue of DV related to AB 109 (Realignment) efforts in the County.
- Increase system review strategies including staffing for high risk teams, Domestic Violence Death review team, and other multidisciplinary efforts.
- Continue building capacity of public and private agencies to intervene and prevent violence with particular opportunities to integrate into existing efforts on Healthcare Reform.
- Continue developing integrated/co-located service models such as the Family Justice Center.
- Support coordination and raise awareness about human trafficking as part of the continuum of abuse.
- Continued coordination and introduction of innovative strategies that address the needs of children, youth and families impacted by domestic violence.
- Increase and leverage additional public and private funding.
- Zero Tolerance partners have developed innovative programs and helped thousands of Contra Costa County residents experiencing domestic violence and elder abuse over the past decade. Yet, ZT's work is far from over.

Investment in systems change is a long-term and complex endeavor. In the years ahead, Zero Tolerance partners must continue to strengthen a coordinated and effective system response and implement strategies to learn how to maximize their impact and understand the longer-term outcomes resulting from their collective efforts.

We would like to thank Korwin Consulting for its assistance with this report.