



PHOTO: Impacted by COVID-19 safety protocols, Judge Jay Knudson administers DV Court proceedings virtually.

New Choices maintains support amid pandemic

After a brief suspension of classes at the onset of the pandemic in March, New Choices has modified its program to maintain consistency and support for its participants.

During the suspension, staff researched alternative delivery models and worked to maintain communication and regular check-ins with participants. They resumed classes after just a few weeks, meeting via Zoom, adjusting group sizes and duration of meetings to make these Zoom sessions more manageable. Intakes are provided on an individual basis, either in person or virtually depending on a participant's comfort level.

"Our program was one of the first in North Dakota to take on Zoom and has been successful in shifting the entire program to a virtual service," said Director of Domestic Violence Intervention Taylor Sorensen.

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“Our families supported the implementation of virtual visitation delivery, which allowed us to continue serving about half of our clients.”

Sheila Morris, CVIC Director of Visitation and Exchange



When our region became impacted by the international COVID-19 pandemic, the North Dakota Supreme Court issued an administrative order that halted compliance review hearings through May.

“To everyone’s surprise, even without holding any sort of review hearings for two months the vast majority of participants remained compliant with the court’s orders and continued their programming,” said Max Kollman, Domestic Violence Court coordinator.

But, he said, participants expressed feeling out of touch, missing the required check-ins with the judges during the court’s suspension. The judges made a video, checking in with participants and letting them know how important it was to continue attending programming and taking care of their loved ones, recognizing and acknowledging the heightened stress during COVID.

“The video was shared with participants during New Choices sessions and was very well received,” said Kollman. “They were glad to know the judges were

still paying attention and cared about their success during the pandemic.”

For the few who have been most non-compliant, telephone review hearings were held throughout the summer to get them back on track. In August, court resumed using Zoom, a transition that is working effectively.

PROGRAM PARTNERS ADJUST DELIVERY

“The states attorney’s office has continued to ensure victims are afforded the opportunity to participate in court appearances over the phone or via Zoom,” said Haley Wamstad. “As always, victims are apprised of the status of the proceedings and are provided opportunities for input on sentencing and to submit victim input statements to the court.”

CVIC programs have adopted new tools like DocuSign to complete paperwork electronically; use of Zoom or phone.

Parole and probation staff met with probationers in their office or other locations to accommodate

social distancing.

“We are meeting with new cases in the office in order to complete their intake and get them engaged in probation,” said John Knutson. They meet with some outside and others at homes when deemed necessary. “In all instances we use personal protective equipment,” he said.

CVIC’s Kids First supervised visitation and exchange program became the first in the state to provide virtual visitations. “Our families supported the implementation of virtual visitation delivery, which allowed us to continue serving about half of our clients,” said the program’s director Sheila Morris. “For some families,” she added, “virtual delivery provides an even better way to begin connecting with their children by eliminating transportation barriers and allowing for reconnection to happen, a step removed for a parent who may not have had contact for some time,”

They began phasing back in-person visitations in October on a modified basis.

NEW CHOICES by the numbers

In addition to continued positive outcomes for DV Court participants, program results for non-DVC participants is realizing significant improvement between August 2019-20 when compared with 2018-19 statistics.

Average **DAYS TO COMPLETE***

DVC: 228

Non-DVC: 223

1 year change: **↓9%**

DVC: **↑7%**

Non-DVC: **↓12%**

*Men

average **DISPOSITION/RELEASE to INTAKE/EVALUATION**

DVC: 39 days

Non-DVC: 54 days

1 year change: **↓41%**

DVC: **↓21%**

Non-DVC: **↓70%**

Individuals **ORDERED TO COMPLETE INTAKES**

DVC: 108 Non-DVC: 25

1 year change: **↓6%**

DVC: **↓2%**

Non-DVC: **↓19%**

Partner contacts jump 89%

New Choices' partner contact process has continued to expand, with 506 contacts initiated between July 2019 and June 2020. Staff update participants' partners at intake, program start, at the halfway point, and upon completion or termination.



Training draws nearly 100

Strangulation expert Casey Gwinn was in Grand Forks in August, training judges, prosecutors, law enforcement, medical and social service professionals and advocates. A total of 93 participated in a hybrid of in-person and virtual participation.

Gwinn, president of Alliance for HOPE International, is a leading expert in non-fatal strangulation and suffocation assaults in intimate partner violence cases. He addressed topics including:

Lethality of strangulation

Links to other crimes

Identifying signs and symptoms of strangulation

Investigating and documenting domestic violence and sexual assault strangulation cases

Legal aspects of cases with surviving victims

Advocating for traumatized victims

The event was sponsored by CVIC's Coordinated Community Response Project through a federal grant.

Director of Community Response Jennifer Albert said, "Trainings like these are critical to improving our systems' responses to violence. We're thrilled so many professionals from around the state and region found value in it and will be taking it back to their communities to enhance their work."

Of post-event survey respondents, 100% said the course met their educational objectives. "I was constantly engaged, even in an online setting," said one.

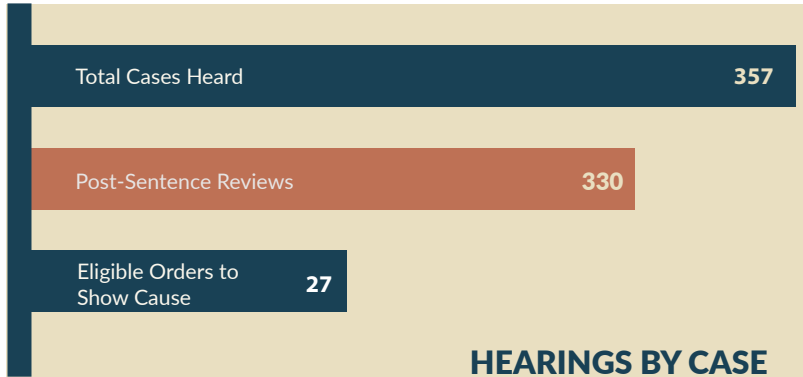
"The whole course was wonderful and very informational. I will be able to use the information with current cases," said another.

[Get Strangulation Training course materials, recordings at this Dropbox link.](#)

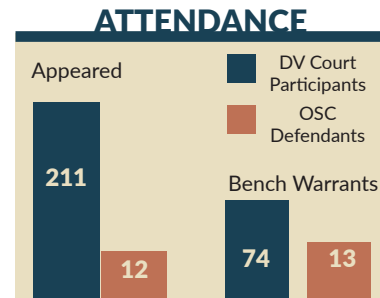
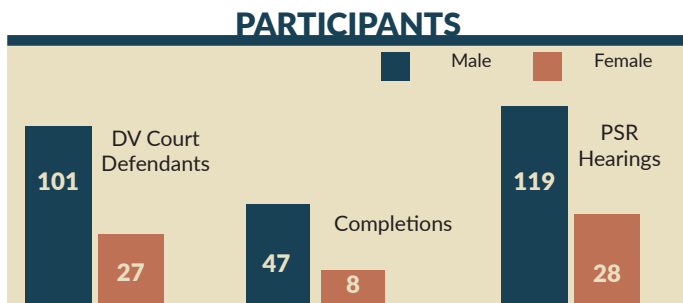


DV COURT DATA

Aug. 2019 - Aug. 2020



sessions held **18**
total DV Court roster **221**



DV COURT STEERING COMMITTEE

Northeast Central Judicial District
701-787-2700
Jason McCarthy, District Judge
Jay Knudson, District Judge
Scott Johnson, Court Administration
Rebecca Absey, Clerk of District Court
Alison Fiala, Deputy Clerk of Court

Grand Forks County States Attorney's Office
701-780-8281
Haley Wamstad, State's Attorney

ND DOCR Parole and Probation
701-795-3885
John Knutson, Northeast Program Manager

Grand Forks Public Defender's Office
701-795-3910
David Ogren, Supervising Attorney

Job Service North Dakota
701-795-3700
Missy Tillman, Offender Employment Specialist

Vogel Law Firm
701-203-8760
Matthew Dearth, Attorney

Community Violence Intervention Center
701-746-0405
Max Kollman, DV Court Project Coordinator
Jennifer Albert, Director of Community Response
Teresa Eisenman, CCR Data Assistant
Peggy Love, Director of Victim Witness Services
Taylor Sorensen, Director of Domestic Violence Intervention
Sheila Morris, Director of Visitation & Exchange

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