



Winter 2017

FAMILY SERVICES  
SUPPORTING TULARE COUNTY

# Family Matters

*"The High-Risk Team Model is an evidence based practice that we believe will save lives. If we can predict the cases that could become lethal, we can prevent them, and that's what this team will work together to do."*

**Photo:** Domestic Violence High Risk Team members from Family Services, the Tulare County Sheriff's Department, District Attorney's Office, and Probation meet bi-monthly to share information and collaborate to design interventions for the highest-risk domestic violence cases in the county.

## High-Risk Team Aims to Prevent Domestic Violence Homicides

Domestic violence homicides are often perceived as coming out of nowhere—as something that happens when a partner “just snaps.” Research tells a different story. We now know that the escalation of domestic violence to a lethal level follows an identifiable pattern with identifiable indicators. A new collaborative effort in Tulare County is focusing on using those indicators to identify which cases are escalating toward a homicide and to find opportunities for the system to intervene early on.

The effort is called the Domestic Violence High-Risk Team (DVHRT) Model. Family Services and the Tulare County Sheriff's Office are co-leading the project, which also includes the Tulare County District Attorney's Office, and the Tulare County Probation Department. The DVHRT Model incorporates evidence-based risk assessment tools into

*Story continued on next page*

### Connect With Us

815 West Oak  
Visalia, CA 93291

Phone (559) 732-1970  
Fax (559) 732-1987

[www.fstc.net](http://www.fstc.net)  
[info@fstc.net](mailto:info@fstc.net)



@FamilySvcTC



[fb.com/FamilyServicesTC](https://fb.com/FamilyServicesTC)

Tulare County’s domestic violence response system to identify the most dangerous cases—those that are at greatest risk of lethal or near lethal assault. The multidisciplinary team then meets regularly to monitor these high-risk cases, sharing case information and implementing specific intervention plans to mitigate the danger.

The Tulare County Sheriff’s Office and Family Services of Tulare County are both using new risk assessment tools when working with domestic violence cases. Sheriff’s Office detectives and deputies are using an 11-question tool called the Danger Assessment for Law Enforcement (DA-LE) when responding to any call involving domestic violence. Advocates at Family Services are using an in-depth, 20-question tool with survivors who are seeking out services, called the Danger Assessment. Both were developed by Dr. Jacquelyn Campbell of Johns Hopkins University, the leading researcher in the field of intimate partner homicide.

When a deputy uses the DA-LE during a domestic violence call and the case screens in as high-risk, the deputy advises the survivor that they are in a dangerous situation and urges them to get help.

“Research shows that there is something powerful about intervention from law enforcement just after an incident because the survivor is very open,” said Caity Meader, Executive Director of Family Services. “When a member of law enforcement says to them, ‘based on the answers to these questions, I’m very afraid for your safety’ it can make a huge difference.”

The hope is that more survivors of domestic violence will seek safety before the situation escalates to a lethal or near lethal one. According to Campbell’s research, the majority of domestic violence homicide victims, offenders, or both—up to 83%—had contact with criminal justice, victim assistance, or health care agencies in the year prior to the homicide. In the year prior to the homicide, more than 44% of abusers were arrested, and almost one-third of victims contacted the police.

At the same time, only 4% of domestic violence



Family Services Executive Director Caity Meader speaks at a press conference announcing the Domestic Violence High Risk Team on October 16 along with District Attorney Tim Ward (left) and Sheriff Mike Boudreaux (right.)

## Tulare County’s Domestic Violence High Risk Team

### How it Works

The escalation of domestic violence to a lethal level follows an **identifiable pattern** with **identifiable indicators**.

Sheriff’s Office and Family Services use evidence-based tools to identify survivors at highest risk of being murdered or seriously assaulted.

Cases go to Tulare County’s Domestic Violence High Risk Team for review, ongoing monitoring, and intervention.

**Survivor  
Safety**

**Offender  
Accountability**



homicide victims had used a domestic violence hotline or lived in a confidential shelter within the year prior to being killed by their partner.

"This is the key. We are trying to develop innovative ways to reach victims who are not walking through the doors of our shelter, to let them know that help exists, because our services are protective," said Meader.

All cases from the Sheriff's Office that have screened in as high risk go to the DVHRT for review and intervention (Family Services only refers the case to the DVHRT with the survivor's permission.) Representatives from the four partner agencies meet in person, twice a month, to review each case. The bimonthly meetings ensure an open line of communication between all members of the team, allowing each agency to take actions to increase safety for the victim and maximize accountability for the offender.

The DVHRT Model is a nationally-recognized domestic violence homicide prevention framework identified by the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women as a leading promising practice in the field. Tulare County was selected through a competitive application process as one of two communities in the United States to receive customized training and technical assistance to fully implement the Model.

Monica Rodriguez is Family Services' DVHRT Coordinator. In her role, she manages the administrative processes of the High Risk Team and serves as Family Services' primary contact person with domestic violence survivors who are at highest risk.

"I am humbled to be part of something that has the potential to save lives," said Rodriguez. "Since our community is one of the first to fully roll out the High Risk Team Model, we have the ability to influence other communities to implement a process like this. Tulare County is at the forefront, and I see us being part of a larger movement that helps survivors in our own community and beyond." ●



**Left:** Monica Rodriguez, Family Services' Domestic Violence High Risk Team Coordinator.  
**Right:** DVHRT partner agencies participated in a panel discussion on domestic violence at a 210 Connect community forum on November 13. From left: Lieutenant Mark Gist from the Tulare County Sheriff's Office; Caity Meader, Executive Director of Family Services; Katrina Brownson, Deputy District Attorney; and Tate Rankin, Division Manager from Tulare County Probation.



## FAMILY SERVICES

SUPPORTING TULARE COUNTY

### Our Mission

The mission of Family Services is to help children, adults, and families throughout Tulare County heal from violence and

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# Stories of Hope: How Trauma-Informed Values Shape Our Work

Over the past three years, Family Services has been refining its practices and policies to become trauma-informed. This means that as an organization, we do our best to make decisions and design programs based on a solid understanding of trauma and its far-reaching effects over a person’s lifespan.

Trauma is an experience that causes intense physical and psychological stress and can overwhelm a person’s ability to cope. When someone is exposed to multiple traumatic events that are invasive and interpersonal in nature, they experience complex trauma. Complex trauma involves direct harm, exploitation, or maltreatment. Domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse are examples of experiences that can cause complex trauma.

Trauma, and especially complex trauma, can cause physical changes to three main areas of the brain: the prefrontal cortex or the “Thinking Center,” the anterior cingulate cortex or the “Emotion Regulation Center,” and the amygdala or the “Fear Center.” In a traumatized brain, the Thinking Center and Emotion Regulation Center are under-activated, and the Fear Center is over-activated.

This means that trauma survivors may have trouble thinking clearly and may have a short attention span. They may struggle to regulate their emotions or bounce back after what might seem like a fairly minor annoyance. And because their Fear Center is always on high alert, they may experience chronic stress and have a hard time feeling physically or emotionally safe.

Being trauma-informed means that Family Services takes these challenges into account when working with our clients. We actively work to create an environment that promotes physical and emotional safety, reduces the risk of re-traumatization, and creates pathways for our clients to heal from trauma. We have adopted five trauma-informed values to guide our work.

The stories that follow celebrate our clients’ successes and illustrate how these values shape our day-to-day work, promote healing, and give us hope for healthier tomorrows for our clients.

## Trauma-Informed Values

- 1. Safety:** We focus on clients’ physical and emotional safety.
- 2. Trustworthiness:** We maximize transparency, make tasks clear, and maintain appropriate boundaries.
- 3. Choice:** Clients participate in shared decision making and goal-setting to determine the plan of action they need to heal.
- 4. Collaboration:** We collaborate and share power with clients.
- 5. Empowerment:** We recognize and build upon individuals’ strengths, experiences, and internal personal power.

## 1. Safety

Maria, a young, undocumented mother, came to Family Services for help fleeing a grave domestic violence situation with her husband, who was involved with a Mexican drug cartel and had a violent history. During her first night at the shelter, someone broke into her car which was parked in the neighborhood, stealing her birth certificate, ID, and immigration documents she had worked hard to obtain.

Maria was in crisis— the break-in left her with no sense of physical or emotional safety. She believed that there was no safe place for her family to hide, and that her husband or someone hired by him would eventually find and harm her and her children.

The staff at *Karen’s House* recognized the importance of helping Maria regain safety before doing anything else. They showed her how the security cameras

worked and where blind spots were so she could avoid them. They worked with her to create a safety plan, revisiting and role-playing it with her daily.

After several weeks, Maria finally felt her level of safety increasing and she was able to begin receiving counseling and legal services. Maria and her children were able to stay at *Karen's House* until it was safe enough for them to move on. Maria knows it may be a long road for her and her family to heal from the violence they have experienced, but she is determined not to give up. Maria continues to push forward.



## 2. Trustworthiness

Jack, a 75-year old man, had been physically abused and financially exploited by his wife. Because he had been raised to protect and never hurt women, he just endured the abuse. After a serious assault that led to physical injuries, he left home and lived in his car to give her time to “calm down.” During these several days, he had no money, no access to bank accounts, and no food.

Jack called multiple agencies trying to get some help, but people were having a hard time believing that his frail, elderly wife could have physically abused him. When seeking help, he started leaving out the parts about abuse and just said he was homeless. Still having trouble getting the type of help he needed, Jack came across information about Family Services’ Abuse in Later Life project and called our victim advocate.

After talking to the advocate a few times over the phone, he built enough trust that he could fully tell his story. The advocate believed him and helped him understand that the abuse was not his fault. The advocate also clearly explained Jack’s options about reporting the abuse to law enforcement or choosing not to, and assured him that the services we provide are available to him either way.

Without feeling judged or emasculated, Jack was able to trust Family Services and his victim advocate and receive help with housing, attending a legal clinic, and obtaining a restraining order. Today, he is back in his home and safe from abuse.

## 3. Choice



Luis is a four-year-old with an abundance of energy and an adoptive family who loves him very much. His adoptive mom brought him to Family Services’ Children’s Counseling Center because Luis was having trouble calming down after tantrums. Mom didn’t know how to help him de-escalate, and their interactions were becoming more and more of a power struggle.

Luis and his mom worked together with Anna, a child therapist, who was able to educate Mom on

[Story continued on next page](#)



the impact that early childhood trauma and drug exposure had on Luis’s brain development. Until then, Mom hadn’t made the connection between these early challenges and his struggle to regulate his emotions. Anna also helped Mom come up with ways for little Luis to have more choices throughout his day. They let Luis lead during sessions and have his voice validated. As Mom put her new parenting tools into practice at home, she began to see a difference. When Luis had more voice and felt like he had some “say so” throughout the day, he was more calm. Eventually, she saw the severity of his tantrums decreasing and noticed that she was able to be more attentive and focused on his needs.

#### 4. Collaboration



Danielle came to Family Services after law enforcement encouraged her to seek help for domestic violence. Soon after we met her, we realized her case was more complicated than that. Danielle disclosed that not only had her husband been physically abusing her, he had also forced her to engage in sex trafficking.

Family Services’ domestic violence, legal, and human trafficking teams worked together with Danielle to help her find safety and collaborated with her every step of the way— from determining her best option for safe housing, to deciding how and whether to report the human trafficking aspect of her case. When she did decide to report, the detective and District Attorney became part of Danielle’s collaborative “team” and also asked for her input in their processes.

Danielle had reported domestic violence many times in her 10 years with her husband, but this time she was able to break free. She said the difference was participating in a collaborative process where so many people were concerned for her well-being. Danielle has transformed from victim to survivor and is moving forward with her goals.

#### 5. Empowerment

Zachary came to Family Services’ Children’s Counseling Center for support as he was preparing to go through the court process and testify against a family member who had sexually abused him. He was a quiet, very shy teenager who struggled with self-esteem and was dealing with a lot of anxiety over having to face his abuser in court.

During sessions with his therapist, he worked on his narrative. He practiced telling his story in several different ways—creating artwork, telling his story through a comic strip—until he was able to talk about the details of what had happened.

Not only was Zachary able to testify, but the process of preparing for and accomplishing this became a turning point in his life. Once he realized his inner strength, he began to flourish. Over the next two years, his mantra became “I can do this” and his growing self-esteem gave him the confidence to try new things. He started making new friends, got involved in extra-curricular activities, and was even crowned Homecoming King. Today, Zachary continues to use his voice as a college student. ●





# Thanks for Giving!

One day. Hundreds of businesses and organizations. Dozens of volunteers. Three thousand live plants. More than \$30,000 raised for Family Services' mission.

Thanks to your support, Family Services' 19th Annual "Thanks for Giving" Mum Sale was a lot of fun and a big success. Thanks to our generous sponsors, the **Foundation for Medical Care** of Tulare and Kings Counties, Inc., and **Gary Meinhold Farms**, the entire \$10 selling price of each plant will go directly to the mission of Family Services. We would also like to thank **ServiceMaster by Benevento, Cal Bennetts**, volunteers from the **Tulare County Sheriff's Department** and **Visalia Police Department** and the rest of our wonderful crew of hardworking volunteers for their support on delivery day.

*Thanks for giving!*



## Purple Party Honors Domestic Violence Awareness Month



October was Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and on October 7, Family Services of Tulare County hosted its third annual Purple Party. Attendees joined together to raise more than \$17,000 for *Karen's House*, Family Services' emergency domestic violence shelter.

The event was held at the Visalia Rawhide Hall of Fame Club and featured a silent auction, dinner from Café 225, a photo booth, an all-vinyl DJ, plenty of purple party favors, and a Mystery Box fundraiser sponsored by **Brown's Custom Jewelry**. Children in Family Services' programs decorated boxes, and guests purchased them for \$50 each. One box contained a diamond necklace generously donated by Brown's Custom Jewelry, but all of the boxes had something fun inside.

Family Services would like to thank all of the sponsors, donors, and volunteers who made the event such a success.

## Thank you to these "Hero" and "Advocate" Sponsors



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Family Services  
815 West Oak, Visalia, CA 93291  
Phone: (559) 732-1970  
Fax: (559) 732-1987  
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**24-Hour Domestic Violence Hotline**  
(559) 732-5941 or 1-(800) 448-2044

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Change a life. Donate today.  
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## Help Brighten a Local Family's Holiday through Santa Store



Family Services' Santa Store provides a dignified Holiday shopping experience for families we serve who would not otherwise be able to purchase gifts. Our staff pre-screens families for eligibility, helps them determine needs and shopping lists, and brings them to our temporary "store" to pick out gifts for their children. Children also have the opportunity to select gifts for their parents. For most participants, these are the only gifts exchanged for the holidays.

We are collecting donated gifts and wrapping supplies through Wednesday, December 13. To arrange for drop-off or pick-up of your donation, please contact Child Advocate Gisela Galvez at 559-732-5941 or email her at [gisela.galvez@fstc.net](mailto:gisela.galvez@fstc.net).

Toys are needed each year, but the Santa Store is often low on gifts for older kids and teenagers. Teens tend to love small denomination gift cards, headphones, and bath and body sets.

For more information about Santa Store, or to make a monetary donation that will be used toward the purchase of gifts, please visit our website at [www.fstc.net/santa](http://www.fstc.net/santa).



**Top Photo:** Volunteers from Calvary Chapel in Visalia dropped off a carload of gifts and supplies for our 2016 Santa Store. **Bottom Photo:** Child Advocate Gisela Galvez wraps a child's gift.