

Faith-Based and Community Organizations Play a Vital Role
in Domestic Violence Programs

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For those living in rural jurisdictions, the lack of available services, geographic isolation, the economic structure, and strong socio-cultural pressures contribute to difficulties in accessing social services for victims of domestic violence, dating violence and child victimization, and rehabilitation for offenders. OVW's Domestic Violence and Child Victimization grants seek to overcome the challenges and barriers unique to rural areas, by supporting local community-based projects that are uniquely designed to prevent and address these crimes in rural jurisdictions.

Prior to receiving a Rural Domestic Violence and Child Victimization grant, Jefferson County, Oregon, had only one victim's advocate working out of the District Attorney's office. Today, that has changed. Through the efforts of the grant coordinator, the domestic violence task force has been revived and is becoming the Jefferson County Domestic Violence Council. A Domestic Violence Team has also been formed, and a school-based domestic violence educational curriculum has been implemented. In addition, a domestic violence resource guide has been published and distributed, and a training regimen for law enforcement is now in place. A domestic violence newspaper is now distributed in both English and Spanish throughout Jefferson County.

One Jefferson County man who struggled with violent behavior is now on the road to recovery, thanks to the programs set up in his community. "I cringe when I think of the violence that I exposed my family to," he said. "My teenage daughter finally had the courage to call the police and put an end to this. May God bless her for confronting me." He now encourages other people to support those trying to make positive changes in their lives. "We need to stop exposing children to violence in the home. I would not be here without many supportive people in our community. My wish is that people will reach out for help before they lose everything like I did."

The President's Faith-Based and Community Initiative aims to help people in need by supporting the work of faith- and community-based groups to solve our nation's social problems. The President believes that government can work in partnership with these grassroots organizations, not against them. Thus a main priority of the Initiative has been to identify and eliminate the institutional barriers that prevent faith-based and other community organizations from competing for federal grants.

The Initiative is not a grant program and neither the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, nor the Justice Task Force on Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, award grants. All government grants are awarded through existing federal grant program offices. The role of the Task Force has been to help ensure equal access to federal grant opportunities for all interested and qualified social service providers. The Department has therefore worked to streamline its grant program solicitations so that they are shorter and easier to read. Through our

efforts, many criminal justice strategies now anticipate a role for qualified faith-based and other community organizations. The Task Force has also reached out to faith-based and community groups to provide them with technical assistance regarding funding opportunities through the Department or through the state agencies that administer Departmental formula or block grant funds.

A signature accomplishment of the Task Force is the January 2004 promulgation of a regulation entitled “Participation in Justice Department Programs by Religious Organizations; Providing for Equal Treatment of all Justice Department Program Participants.” It applies to all Department employees, vendors, grantees (including state and local governmental agencies), and sub-grantees. As applied to the administration of OVW funds, this regulation:

- Prohibits discrimination for or against an organization on the basis of religion, religious belief, or religious character;
- Allows a participating religious organization to retain its independence and continue to carry out its mission, provided that OVW funds to grantees and sub-grantees do not support any inherently religious activities;
- Clarifies that faith-based organizations can use space in their facilities to provide OVW – funded services without removing religious art, icons, scriptures, or other religious symbols;
- Ensures that OVW-funded services are available to all beneficiaries, regardless of their religion; and
- Eliminates the requirement that OVW grantees and sub-grantees obtain tax-exempt status under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code to be eligible for funding.

A copy and summary of the regulation is available on the Task Force website at www.ojp.usdoj.gov/fbci. You may obtain more information about the regulation and report possible violations to the Office of Justice Programs, Office for Civil Rights [(202) 307-0690 or www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ocr]. Moreover, the Task Force welcomes your inquiries [(202) 514-2987 or by e-mail at FBCI@usdoj.gov].