



**Monroe County Domestic Violence Coalition  
Meeting Minutes  
August 17, 2018**

**Mission:** The Monroe County Domestic Violence Coalition is committed to improving our community's response to domestic violence issues through communication and coordination of services.

**Attending:** Jennifer Whitaker (Centerstone), Brittany Lawrence (DCS), Shelby Jade Hoshaw (POAP), H. Michelle Gregory (H. Michelle Gregory LLC), Pam Gladish (Bloomington Police), Harry Heyer (Character Restoration), Debra Morrow (MWH), Dave Wright (CASA), Karisha Kirk (CASA), Susan Wannamaker (CASA), Cynthia Perez (Connect 211), Katelyn Lipa (Red Cross), Ed Ryan (CASA), Robert Althausen (CASA), Hannah Nunn (DCS)

**Guests:** Melissa Brown (Susie's Place), Charlotte Willian (Susie's Place)

**City Staff:** Michael Shermis (CFRD)

**I. Introductions**

**II. Guest Speaker Presentation**

Guest Speakers: Melissa Brown, Senior Forensic Interviewer, and Charlotte Willian, Child/Family Advocate, Susie's Place  
Topic: Child Abuse and Forensic Interviewing

**Overview:**

- Susie's place is a Child Advocacy Center. When there is a report with a concern for a child, they are referred to a child advocacy center. Sometimes that comes from DCS, sometimes law enforcement. Then, when they do a forensic interview, the interviewer meets with the child alone in a viewing room. On the other side is staff from DCS, Prosecution, law enforcement, as well as a child advocate from Susie's Place.

## Interviewing:

- While the interview is going on Charlotte frequently meets with family, helps with follow up resources, mental health resources, like therapy, and finding any other needed resources in their community.
- For medical issues, a doctor and nurse practitioners can come when scheduled. And a SANE can come (used to have to be sent to Riley).
- In the past year, Susie's did 520 interviews last year from 6-7 counties regularly, but sometimes a few more.
- They do use therapy dogs (like Jordy from CASA) or companion dogs during their interviews.
- Room is set up be like a home, very comfortable, games, etc.
- Melissa is the forensic interviewer (and they have one other) and has done about 550 interviews.
- A forensic interview is an information gathering session.
- The interviewer isn't called an interviewer, but just "having a chat."
- They always use child-first protocols.
- The interviewers try to get rapport, transition to topic, then close.
- If kid can't do it, then they are given a break or it can end. But they always end on a positive note.
- When they see domestic violence cases, they do know what the allegations are ahead of time, but don't know what the team thinks so they can be unbiased.
- For language they don't say things are a truth or lie, instead real or not real.
- They do a lot of exploration of home and home environment, like who cooks, etc.
- They ask questions like:
  - What helps when you know mom is really happy? Reads me in story
  - What helps when you know when mom isn't happy? Parents fighting.
  - And they ask follow-up questions on what fighting means, i.e., physical contact
  - Team can ask things, like "ask them about the gas station" if there was a specific incident.
- They try to steer clear of major trauma.
- It needs to be ongoing investigation for them to do the interview.
- On site they have a clothing closet, backpacks, stuffed animals, etc.
- Interviews are tailored for the child. They don't force the kids or push them to do/say anything the child doesn't want to do.
- They get very good at redirection.
- Interviewing for sexual abuse and then finding domestic violence is more common than the other way around.
- Parents and caregivers who brings the kids in have experienced huge trauma a lot of the time, too. Lots of fear and uncertainty. Parents sometimes spill it all out while in the waiting room.
- Alleged offenders not allowed on site.
- 60% of interviews end in disclosure and 40% of interviews end in no disclosure.
- DCS and law enforcement decide what gets to be shared with parent.

#### Demographics:

- Victims are 1/3 male and 2/3 female.
- 95 of offenders are male.
- 75% are for sexual abuse and 25% are grouped together for other issues, like as witness to violent crimes.
- They take any age (but find it very challenging if the child is non-verbal, i.e., answer open ended questions as opposed to just a yes or no answer). Hard for less than two, but can be done by using their own language.
- They can interview even older people who might have developmental problems.

#### Training:

- For training they have a 5-day Child First program, mentoring, and peer reviews. Every six months there is a national peer review and one national training week every year.

### **III. Information sharing**

CASA folks announced a forum: The Link between Animal Cruelty and Domestic Violence, hosted by Monroe County Sheriff's Office and Monroe County LINK alliance, on Tuesday, September 18<sup>th</sup>, 5-9 p.m., Wegmiller Auditorium, IU Health Bloomington.

### **IV. Staff Update**

Stats booklet is still available for distribution. Just let Michael know how many copies you need.