



# FAMILY VIOLENCE INTERVENTION AND EDUCATION SESSIONS

## PROJECT REPORT

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**Project Year 2017**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Family Violence Intervention and Education Session (FVIES) is a brief, court-ordered, restorative justice class in which misdemeanor offenders of relationship violence learn about the impacts of family violence from a panel of experts whose aim is to help participants gain a better understanding of family violence and offer hope for change.

This report follows a comprehensive 2016 report which reviewed the development process and first year of implementation and includes the interactions with the courts and the forms used in FVIES sessions. Please refer to the 2016 report available upon request for more in-depth information on the implementation process and court-related protocols and documents.

This 2017 report focuses on the four components that comprise the philosophy and reasoning behind the sessions and provides some demographic information. FVIES is modeled after the restorative justice model known as impact panels in which people who have experienced violence describe the impact it had on their lives; speakers approach the audience with compassion and nonjudgement. Participants also learn key information about the brain and effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences as well as resources and practices to decrease violence.

Quantitative and qualitative data gathered from the evaluations provided by class participants helps demonstrate the initial impact the class had on attendees and provides basic demographic information about participants. Overall, the collaborative team implementing the FVIES project is pleased that evaluations of the project indicate that **82 percent of the 104 participant evaluations in 2017 report that they learned something new about family violence.**

The Family Violence Intervention and Education Session (FVIES) is a project of JUST Response—Missoula's multidisciplinary system response to Domestic\* and Sexual Violence, and Child Abuse. Justice system and community members work together to improve victim safety and hold offenders accountable. JUST Response is a collaboration between Missoula City-County Relationship Violence Services and Providence St. Patrick Hospital's First Step Resource Center.

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\*The term **Domestic Violence** includes **Family Violence, Intimate Partner Violence, Relationship Violence, and Teen Dating Violence.**

## OVERVIEW OF FAMILY VIOLENCE INTERVENTION AND EDUCATION SESSIONS

The Family Violence Intervention and Education Session (FVIES) is a two-hour, court-ordered class designed to decrease the pattern of violent behavior in misdemeanor offenders of family violence. Persons convicted of domestic violence related crimes<sup>1</sup> are sentenced to the educational class that is designed to increase awareness of the effects of family violence and provide examples of people who were able to escape the pattern of violence and disfunction. FVIES participants are afforded the opportunity to gain a new perspective on their childhood experiences, their past use of violence, and the prospect of future change. Class information is presented in a compassionate, non-judgmental manner that emphasizes accountability and taking responsibility, and the potential for non-violent relationships.

FVIES was developed with a similar format and goal as Domestic Violence Impact Panels (DVIP) that are utilized in other justice systems throughout the United States including Washington and Arizona. After a year of visioning and development—which included sending a team to attend a Domestic Violence Impact Panel in Auburn, Washington, and a mock session for local professionals—the first panel took place in July 2015.

Classes consist of a domestic violence survivor and a reformed-offender each talking to the audience about the impact violence had on their lives and how they recovered from disfunction. A skilled batterer's intervention counselor facilitates the session and a certified Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) trainer provides information about brain development and the impact that negative childhood experiences can have on a person's future mental and physical health including the risk for violence.

Prior to the start of class, participants are asked to provide basic demographic information, their initial expectations for the class, and their level of knowledge about family violence. After the class, participants complete an evaluation of the information that was presented, receive appropriate resource referrals, and a Certificate of Completion.

Judges require individuals to attend the session, which costs defendants \$20 cash, as a condition of their sentence following a conviction of a first or second offense of misdemeanor Partner or Family Member Assault or other crimes described above. The money goes into a fund to assist domestic violence survivors and pays the speakers for their time. The money has helped survivors with rent, utilities, medical costs and for one victim, a new pair of glasses that her partner smashed.

Because the class is court-ordered, participants must demonstrate accountability. Sessions begin promptly at the start time and anyone who is late is refused entry. The Missoula County Sheriff's Department ensures speaker and participant safety by assigning an officer to ensure the participants are respectful and listening to class content.

Participants pay at the door and must return the Certificate of Completion to the court as proof they took the class. If a defendant does not comply with their sentence to attend FVIES, an Order to Show Cause Hearing and a new FVIES date are set, which gives the person a second chance. However, if the defendant does not appear at the Show Cause Hearing or attend the newly-ordered session, court clerks refer the case to the defendant's probation officer or to the appropriate prosecutor's office to revoke the sentence.

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<sup>1</sup> Crimes include: Misdemeanor Partner Family Member Assault, Order of Protection violations, Stalking, Disorderly Conduct, or other criminal offenses.

## DO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IMPACT PANELS LIKE FVIES WORK?

The philosophy and theory behind the Family Violence Intervention and Education Session has attendees saying:

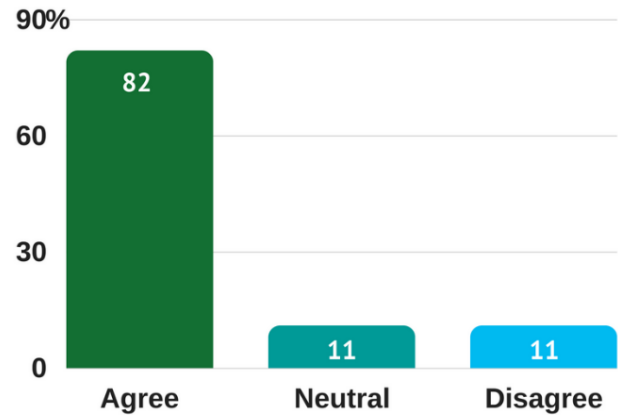
**“It was informative and eye opening” and “It was a great session. Thank you for doing it.”**

Of the 104 evaluations from 2017 participant evaluations, 82% “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” that they learned something new about family violence.

While this is encouraging, it does not prove that participants experience lasting change from attending a session. Very little research exists on the effectiveness of domestic violence impact panels especially those involving family violence offenders. However, findings in one study of Victim Impact Panels in Domestic Violence Cases suggest that panels helped survivors reach new understandings, healing, and empowerment; panel impacts on offenders included connection with survivor speakers, reaching new understandings, and healing.<sup>2</sup>

This information is promising, but to fully understand the impact the class has on participants more research is needed. One effort recently implement is to ask participants to indicate if they have attended a prior class to gain an understanding of recidivism by the offender.

**Participants Reporting They Learned Something New**



## FOUR COMPONENTS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE INTERVENTION AND EDUCATION SESSIONS

FVIES sessions are based on four key components that are known to have a positive impact to change:

1. a restorative justice model, which has been proven to be more effective on behavior change than confinement;<sup>3</sup>
2. the speakers approach each participant with compassion—not judgment or shame, which can increase defensiveness and hinder change;

<sup>2</sup>Fulkerson, A. 2002. The Use of Victim Impact Panels in Domestic Violence Cases: A Restorative Justice Approach <http://restorativejustice.org/rj-library/the-use-of-victim-impact-panels-in-domestic-violence-cases-a-restorative-justice-approach/1918/#sthash.HmQVo7RN.dpbs>

<sup>3</sup> Sottile, Leah. Abuser and Survivor, Face to Face. Can restorative justice, in which offenders talk with people who have been harmed by their crime, work for domestic-violence cases? And who exactly does it benefit? 10/5/2015 <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/10/domestic-violence-restorative-justice/408820/>

3. easy to understand information on brain neurobiology—like the fight or flight response, and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) to educate participants about what is driving their behavior and how it passes to each generation in a family; and
4. resources and skill-building tools that are disseminated in the session for participants to use when they are angry and want to avoid violence in the future.

#### BASED ON A RESTORATIVE JUSTICE MODEL

Victim Impact Panels such as FVIES are a form of restorative justice which is an alternative model to traditional methods of justice. The model encourages offenders to take responsibility for their actions. Once they understand the potential for long-term harm they then can also understand the impact further violence may have on their victims.

“The perpetrator can see, perhaps for the first time, the victim as a real person with thoughts and feelings and a genuine emotional response,” Dan Reisel says in his 2013 TED talk. ‘And [that] may be a more effective rehabilitative practice than simple incarceration.’”<sup>4</sup>

During sessions, victims (not involved with current offenders) explain the impact that family violence has had on their lives and their families by retelling personal stories of violent incidents.

For victims, the goal of restorative justice is to give them an active role and voice in the process. These panels help victims heal by allowing them to explain the harm caused to them and allowing them to share their stories.

In 2017, based on participant’ evaluations, the FVIES team added a reformed-offender speaker who talks about his childhood trauma, use of violence, and what it took for him to change. He also mentions in sessions that it is very hard to revisit the memories of the past, but it also feels good to speak about his challenges in hopes of helping others.



#### One FVIES survivor speaker said:

“I did it! My last time sharing my story of survival at our domestic violence prevention session on Tuesday! It was the biggest group we've had so far but also the most receptive. I'm so thankful to have been chosen for this opportunity - it was a HUGE growing experience for me and really helped in my healing! I don't know where I'd be without this amazing group of supportive people. Yesterday was the 5th anniversary of my tragic "incident" that changed the path of my life forever. I am in such a good place...and it's only going to get better from here!

<sup>4</sup> The Neuroscience of Restorative Justice.

[https://www.ted.com/talks/daniel\\_reisel\\_the\\_neuroscience\\_of\\_restorative\\_justice](https://www.ted.com/talks/daniel_reisel_the_neuroscience_of_restorative_justice)

## COMPASSION—NOT SHAME—SUPPORTS CHANGE

Each FVIES presenter has a deep understanding of family violence and each has a strong desire to educate with compassion and without judgment. No one attempts to shame participants for their past use of violence.

“The problem with shame is that it is a motivator loaded with problems because it is fear based. And instead of differentiating the behavior from the person, it makes the whole person bad, it sends the message that “you are bad” and all that comes along with that...”you aren’t worth helping”, “you can’t be helped”, “you are a lost cause”, and “we need to be rid of you.”<sup>5</sup>

Rather than a motivator for change, shame causes people to withdraw and feel defensive and hopeless; a person convicted of domestic violence can be full of shame and may be rejected or humiliated within their community for their behavior.

**“I learned that everybody’s situation was similar to mine and I’m not alone”<sup>6</sup>**

The survivor and reformed-offender presenters are individuals who have been impacted by domestic violence and share their experiences with change from a place of understanding and concern. Both the victim and reformed-offender describe their experiences with domestic violence and how violence negatively impacted their lives and the lives of their families. The stories illustrate the intergenerational trauma that domestic violence has on families. By sharing their situation and raising awareness the speakers hope a negative experience will become a positive one.

## ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES AND ENDING THE CYCLE OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

In addition to an atmosphere of hope and the possibility of change, participants also benefit from information about brain development by learning how negative experiences in childhood have an impact on future violent experiences, lifelong health, and opportunity.

Exposure in early life to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), which includes physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, is associated with an increased likelihood of intimate partner violence (IPV) in adulthood. Witnessing or experiencing violent events as a child has been hypothesized to lead to the intergenerational transfer of violence through imitating or tolerating similar behaviors in adult relationships.<sup>7</sup>

**“[The class] just woke me up to my own experiences”<sup>8</sup>**

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<sup>5</sup> Wilkens, C., The Pain of Shame. Center for Motivation & Change. <https://motivationandchange.com/the-pain-of-shame/>

<sup>6</sup> Survey of Attendees: Participant quote. July 18, 2017

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Survey of Attendees: Participant quote. July 18, 2017

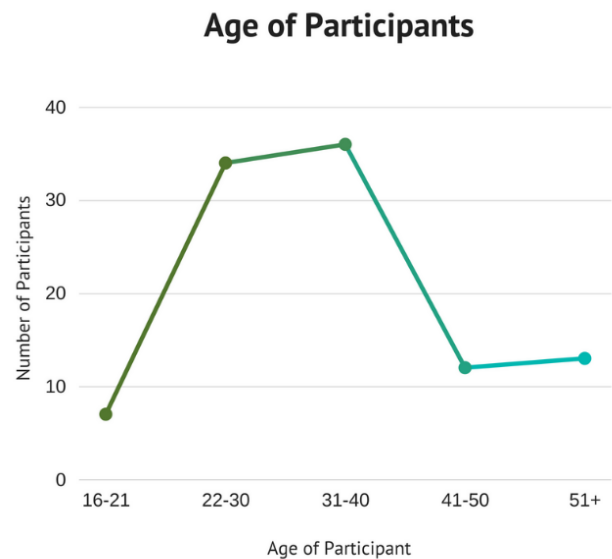
ACES research<sup>9</sup> states that as the number of adverse experiences increase, so does the risk for negative outcomes. Information on ACES is key to helping participants learn how their past experiences as children effects their current situation. Participants complete the ACES questionnaire during the sessions. Although participant' scores were not tracked during 2017, scores will be tracked in the future. Sixty-seven percent of participants in the January 2018 class had 4 or more ACES.

ACES information helps parents understand the impact violence has on their children's present living situation and future health and can motivate parents to seek help to stop using violence. The majority of FVIES participants in 2017 were of child-bearing age and 50% of them indicated they had children.

**"I have a better understanding of how my children have been affected and it's not too late to change"**<sup>10</sup>

In addition to domestic violence, there is a strong relationship between ACES and substance use and related behavioral health problems. While alcohol and drugs do not cause abuse, they can often aggravate circumstances by lowering impulse control and inhibitions.

In 2017, nearly half of the participants indicated that he/she was using substances *during the incident* in which they were found guilty.



### Participants Self-Reported Substance Use



## TOOLS FOR BETTER COMMUNICATION DURING AN ARGUMENT

Information on ACES and compassionate speakers are not enough for FVIES participants to change. They must be motivated to learn about their own trauma and practice skills to avoid violence when they are in an argument.

Participants are asked to indicate what they hope to learn from the Family Violence Intervention and Education Session and many participants indicate a readiness for change.

<sup>9</sup> Centers for Disease Control [https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about\\_ace.html](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about_ace.html)

<sup>10</sup> Survey of Attendees: Participant quote. Jan. 17, 2017

**“Everything I can learn”**

**“To get as much information about how my actions affected everybody in my house”**

Many answers are related to controlling their anger:

**“To not be so angry or hostile”**

Many ask for specific skills and resources to prevent violence:

**“Methods for reducing arguments and having more constructive communication”**

**“How to steer away from violence and avoid it by taking different actions”**

One skill taught by the Batterer Intervention Specialist, is “Time out” in which he teaches the class about how they feel in their bodies when they become angry. This can help them notice when they are becoming angry and can help manage their behavior by taking a break from the argument, seeking out a quiet place, and returning to their partner and the discussion once they have calmed down.

## PROFILE OF FVIES PARTICIPANTS

The survey that participants completed anonymously at each of the FVIES sessions also collects basic demographic information such as gender, age, race, and employment status.

Four sessions were held in 2017 with a total of 104 people completing the evaluation surveys. On average, 34 people attend each session. Based upon a count of participants at each session, 95 percent of attendees completed surveys, therefore five percent of participants are unaccounted for.

Males make up three quarters of the participants with 26% identifying as female. This ratio is consistent with current statistics that point to men being the primary perpetrators of violence, but that women can also perpetrate violence.

### Gender of Participants



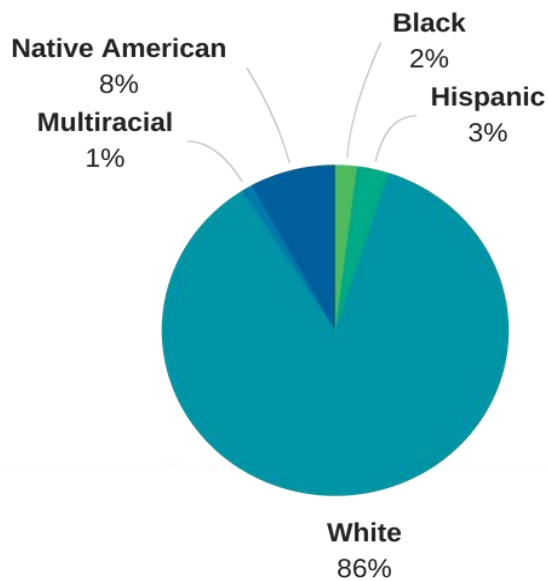
**Males  
74%**



**Females  
26%**



## Race of Participants

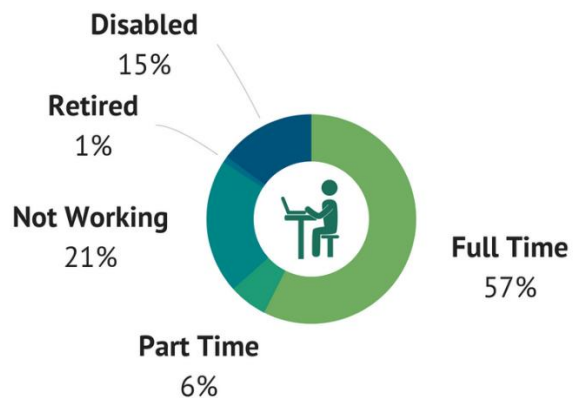


The breakdown of participant's race is similar to the race make-up of Missoula County with some exceptions: 86% of participants indicate they are White but represent 92% of the population in Missoula County. Native Americans represent 8% of participants, but just 2.6% of the population; similarly, Black participants are 2% of the FVIES audience, yet only .5% of Missoula County is Black.

Native American and Black participants are represented at a higher rate than White participants which is notable.

Domestic violence can be exacerbated by stressors such as job loss and lack of money for basic needs like food, shelter and clothing. Unemployment rates in Missoula County were around 4% in 2017, yet 21% of participants indicated they were not working at the time of the session and 6% were only working part time. Nine percent of Missoulian's live with a disability, but 15% of FVIES participants indicate they have a disability and do not work. Just over half of FVIES participants worked full time in 2017.

## Participants Employment Status



## FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS TO FVIES

### TRACK RECIDIVISM

While many of the evaluations from participants are hopeful and indicate that change has taken place, the true test is whether the attendees stop using violence and control. While FVIES presenters remain hopeful that the class has an impact on participants, "authors of a recent study found that individuals with a history of physical violence against their partners are 13 times more likely to commit future acts of physical aggression compared to persons who have never committed this form of physical abuse."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Futures Without Violence. Perpetrator Risk Factors for Violence against Women.

<https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/userfiles/file/Perpetrator%20Risk%20Factors%20Fact%20Sheet%202013.pdf>

Recidivism has been a challenge to track through the courts for multiple reasons, but it remains a goal to identify those who have been ordered to take the class more than once.

## RECORD A SESSION

Missoula County lacks a recorded version of the session. As interest in other communities grows so does the need to be able to provide accessible information about the sessions. A recording would allow sharing with other communities, with new court staff and judges, or be available in case a speaker needs to miss a session. Although session attendees have stated that recorded speakers are not as effective as live, it is also important to include all parts of each session. Currently, there is one DV survivor and one former perpetrator speaker on the panel, the board is working to have more speaker options. In October 2018 and January 2019 MCAT—Missoula’s local community Access Television has awarded a grant to the FVIES team to film and edit the two sessions and produce a recording for such purposes.

## WORK WITH A STORY TELLING EXPERT

Because of the deeply personal nature of the stories that the FVIES survivor and reformed-offender speakers tell, each session comes with concerns that telling their story will re-traumatize the speakers. Furthermore, it is easy for the speakers to become stuck in a memory of an incident because of the nature of brain trauma and move “off track.” FVIES team members helped the speakers identify the most poignant parts of their stories to tell the audience, however the team members are not professional story tells. It may be to help them craft their stories in a way that is both interesting to audiences and can allow them to stick to key points. In August of 2018, the team worked with a storytelling coach to help them find the key pieces to their stories that are most poignant to the audience.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, FVIES sessions are innovative and show promise to help offenders learn about family violence and motivate them to seek help for their violent behaviors. The survivor and reformed-offender speakers enjoy telling their stories in hopes of helping participants. Judges appreciate the resource that compliments batterer’s intervention methods. Other communities like Ravalli County are taking note and adapting the Missoula model to fit their community.