

## **Strong and Peaceful Families**

### **2008 Program Summary**

In partnership with the Joint Domestic Abuse Prosecution Unit (JPU) and the Saint Paul – Ramsey County Department of Public Health,<sup>1</sup> Violence Prevention and Intervention Services (VPIS) of the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation developed the Strong and Peaceful Families program in January 2006. Select JPU families are referred to the Strong and Peaceful Families (SPF) program for case management and other services related to their health, safety, and other basic needs. Through the provision of case management and other services, the program strives to reduce the damaging effects of domestic violence on children and youth, and to stop the cycles of abuse that occur in families which often arise due to children's exposure to serious and persistent violence in their homes.

The program is designed to serve 15 to 30 families per year. This allows staff adequate time and resources to fully assess and address families' intensive needs and issues, as well as work with adults and children so that they can live fulfilling, independent lives despite the violence they have witnessed and endured. The following summarizes program participants and the services provided to families from January to December 2008.

#### ***SPF families***

During 2008, 23 families (including 46 children) received intensive case management services through the SPF program. Families were coping with multiple challenges at the time of their referral to the program. In addition to their experiences with abuse, many of the women were also managing mental health issues, experiencing chronic financial and housing difficulties, and lacking other supports.

For most, mental health and basic needs like food and clothing were the most critical issues. All of the children served by the program had witnessed violence between their parents or caregivers; some had also experienced violence or neglect themselves.

Despite these challenges, families also possessed a number of strengths. Most parents were substance-free, relatively healthy, had good family relationships and social supports, and were adequately managing safety and legal issues, when present. Similarly, children and youth were also substance-free, were attending and performing well in school, and were generally demonstrating positive social and emotional behavior.

#### ***Program services and referrals***

Upon entering the Strong and Peaceful Families program, families are referred to and access a broad range of services. As needed, families receive case management, individual therapy, family therapy, and/or group therapy. Of equal importance, participants in the program have primary case managers who they know that they can turn to for support and affirmation. In total, nearly 500 hours of direct service were provided to families during 2008.

Participants are also referred to services both within Wilder and to other community-based programs. The most prevalent referrals for both parents and children were for housing and mental health services, followed by referrals for basic needs. During the year, referrals were made to over 60 different agencies or programs.

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<sup>1</sup> JPU is a joint effort of the Ramsey County Attorney's Office and the Saint Paul City Attorney's Office, as well as Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health.

### ***Honoring families***

To acknowledge and honor the progress demonstrated by several families who participated in the program to date, a celebratory dinner for nine participants and their families was held in August 2008. Certificates of accomplishment were presented to participants who also had the opportunity to publicly share their personal challenges and successes with program staff, friends and family, and fellow participants.

### ***Program impact***

Eleven families left the program in 2008, eight of whom had successfully completed their goals. These eight families were no longer experiencing violence and had developed strategies for promoting safety in their lives and the lives of their children. Given the small number of families served through the program, it is too early to draw broad conclusions about the outcomes for these families. Nevertheless, preliminary evidence suggests a potentially profound impact on families, as described by one parent following her participation in the program:

*“We’re not afraid anymore when we come home now. We don’t have to wonder if this is a good day or a bad day.”*

Parents also seem to recognize the potential long-term impact of the program on their children. As one parent described her hopes for her child following her participation in the program:

*“I want him to have the love he needs from me. I feel like when he sees me be successful, by keeping a schedule and going to work, he will know he is loved.”*

As more families are served through the program, additional information about the impact of services will be gathered.

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#### **For more information**

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