



COMMISSION

ON SEXUAL & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

INSPIRING AND COORDINATING OUR COMMUNITY'S
EFFORTS TO ADDRESS SEXUAL AND DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE



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History

- ❖ The DV Commission was formed in 1998 by a joint resolution between the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County.
- ❖ In 2006, Ordinances of Support were passed by each of the additional municipalities of Whatcom County.
- ❖ In 2019, the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County voted to expand the mission to include sexual assault.



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Mission

- ❖ To inspire and coordinate our community’s efforts to address sexual and domestic violence.

Goals

- ❖ **Connect institutions, stakeholders, and communities** to collectively increase understanding and effectiveness of community responses for sexual and domestic violence.
- ❖ **Transform systems** to ensure best practice prevention and responses for sexual and domestic violence.
- ❖ **Foster safety, justice, and well-being for survivors** and communities.



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Whatcom County designated government representatives:

- Bruce Van Glubt
- Dave Reynolds
- Erika Lautenbach
- Sheriff Bill Elfo
- Eric Richey
- Starck Follis

Whatcom County community appointments:

- Garret Shelsta, Christ the King
- Moonwater, Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center
- Raquel Vernola, Whatcom Community College
- Dr. Katie Olvera, KPO Counseling LLC
- Jessyca Murphy, Make.Shift Project
- Krista Touros, PeaceHealth
- Emily O’Connor, Lydia Place

DV Commission Funding

- ❖ Whatcom County
- ❖ City of Bellingham
- ❖ Peace Health Foundation

2022-2023 DV Commission Work Plan:

- ❖ Stabilize funding and administrative structures for DV Commission operations.

Restorative Justice/Transformative Justice Pilot

quotes from survivors of domestic violence/sexual assault

"I just want him to acknowledge what he did, to say he's sorry and he understands that it was wrong."

"I just didn't want him to do it to someone else."

"I know that it was messed up, and I wish he'd own up to that, but I also don't want him to go to jail."

Restorative Justice/Transformative Justice Pilot

❖ Partners:

Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center, Lummi Cedar Project, Make.Shift Project, Western Washington University, DVSAS, Domestic Violence Specialist for Small Cities

❖ Goal to develop a pilot in restorative and transformative justice responses to DV/SA in communities, systems, and/or subcultures who are ready (eg arts community, university, criminal legal system, faith communities)

❖ Topic of our 2022 annual meeting: How can restorative and transformative justice address domestic and sexual violence in our community?

Thursday, May 26, 9-10am via zoom

Survivor defendants

quotes from stakeholders serving survivors of domestic violence/sexual assault

"It's not just a couple of nights in jail and you're fine. There are so many other court dates, repercussions, requirements, court-mandated things they have to do. They're just running around continually treated like a criminal."

"The victim-defendant issue is a big, huge problem. I'm not saying the numbers are huge, but any time it happens, it can be devastating."

"I've seen over the years people who are left with a feeling of no other way out of a relationship – the system won't help them, or advocates won't help them, the cops won't help them, the lawyers won't help them."

Survivor defendants

Themes from 2019 report:

- ❖ Arresting and charging survivors causes long-term and complex harm
- ❖ Misconceptions about how victims look and behave can impact who is arrested and charged with domestic violence
- ❖ Context matters

Survivor defendants

Recommendations and implementation, 2022-2023:

- ❖ Host cross-training and networking sessions to share information and build referral systems between defense attorneys and community- and tribal-based DV/SA advocates
- ❖ Develop list of potential expert witnesses for defense for survivor defendant cases
- ❖ Support community-based DV/SA advocacy agencies in adopting and being trained on tools to identify the primary aggressor

Whatcom County Sexual Assault Audit

quotes from survivors of sexual assault

“If nothing else were to change, it is that you need to tell the victim what is going on.”

“There are so many missed opportunities by many people in power to even acknowledge harm done, to offer condolences.”

“Sometimes the way agencies respond, or don’t respond to you ends up actually being worse of an experience than the incident.”

Whatcom County Sexual Assault Audit

Data collected in 2017 and 2018 by multi-disciplinary team

Data collection activities included:

- ❖ Focus groups & interviews with survivors
- ❖ Focus groups & interviews with professional stakeholders
- ❖ Mapping of systems responses
- ❖ Text analysis (agency policies and procedures, police reports, prosecution files)
- ❖ Observations (trial, emergency department processes, MDT meetings)

Whatcom County Sexual Assault Audit

Findings – Themes:

- ❖ Societal myths and misconceptions about sexual assault
- ❖ Implicit bias and oppression, particularly impacting Native survivors

Findings – Gaps:

- ❖ Delays
- ❖ Lack of follow-up and communication
- ❖ Over-focus on survivor credibility
- ❖ Lack of criminal accountability & serial offenders
- ❖ Lack of expertise in trauma-informed responses

Whatcom County Sexual Assault Audit

Recommendations

- ❖ Policy, procedure, protocol, and practice – develop and/or update with best practices
- ❖ Professional training
- ❖ Multi-disciplinary response specific to sexual assault
- ❖ Resources

Implementation in 2022

- ❖ Agency action plans and timelines:
 - advocacy, law enforcement, prosecution, sexual assault forensic examiners
- ❖ Supporting full implementation of 1 recommendation for each agency



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Questions or comments?

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