

Essex County Family Justice Center

Summary of Implementation of the Family Justice Center (FJC) Model

New Jersey's first Family Justice Center was established in 2010 in direct response to the high incidence of domestic violence homicides in Essex County. Following a community assessment to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the local response to domestic violence, along with input from survivors solicited during focus groups, technical assistance from the National Family Justice Center Alliance, and endorsement by the Essex County Domestic Violence Working Group, Essex County Family Justice Center opened in May of that year.

The Family Justice Center Model is designed to reduce the barriers and fragmentation of existing services and meet the diverse needs of victims of domestic violence by bringing government and non-government agencies together in one location. The Family Justice Center movement began with the opening of the San Diego Family Justice Center in 2002. Today there are Family Justice Centers in 43 U.S. states and 25 countries.

The U.S. Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women recognizes the Family Justice Center Model as a best practice in domestic violence intervention and prevention, resulting in reduced homicides; increase victim safety, increased autonomy and empowerment for victims, reduced fear and anxiety for victims and their children, increased prosecution of offenders, and increased community support for services to victims and their children. Core components of the Family Justice Center Model include: community-based domestic violence organizations, law enforcement investigators/detectives, specialized domestic violence prosecution units, and civil legal services. Today, there are four additional Family Justice Centers in New Jersey, one each in Morris, Middlesex, Monmouth, and Union Counties, in addition to Essex County Family Justice Center.

Essex County Family Justice Center (ECFJC), with more than 20 onsite and offsite partners, provides comprehensive services to victims of domestic violence including crisis intervention, safety planning, referrals for emergency financial assistance and housing assistance, medical/behavioral health assessments and referrals, counseling, law enforcement and prosecution assistance, and civil legal assistance. While anyone in need can receive services, 89% of our clients are female, 73% reside in Newark, East Orange, Orange, and Irvington, 31% are immigrants or not US citizens, 25% speak other than English as their primary language, and 83% represent households with total annual incomes of or below \$35,000.

Since opening its door in 2010, Essex County Family Justice Center has served nearly 10,000 over victims who made nearly 27,000 visits to ECFJC. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic from March 2022 to September 2022, when public health restrictions prevented in-person service delivery, the Center continued to provide comprehensive domestic violence services provided for 1,440 clients through virtual means.

All clients served by the Essex County Family Justice Center are assessed for their risk of future domestic homicide using the Danger Assessment Instrument (DAI). The Instrument is an evidence-based risk assessment tool, developed by Dr. Jacquelyn Campbell of the School of Nursing at Johns Hopkins University, that assesses a victim's risk of continued and/or lethal violence. Nearly half of the victims and survivors that Essex County Family Justice serves (38-41%) have DAI scores indicating that they are at high risk of domestic violence homicide.

According to the recently published *Framework Impacts 2021* Impact Study on Family Justice Center outcomes, released by Alliance for Hope International, “cities without Family Justice Centers have some of the highest domestic violence homicide rates in the country. Dynamic Family Justice Centers dramatically reduce the likelihood of a client being murdered.” A link to the *Impact Study* is found [here](#).

The Study also found that “Family Justice Centers are capable of meeting client needs, satisfying clients, reducing homicides, increasing victim safety, making victims more autonomous and empowered, reducing fear and anxiety among victims and their children, helping victims avoid recanting or minimizing their experiences, making service providers more efficient and collaborative, making offenders more likely to be prosecuted, and connecting victims and their children with support services.”

Finally, the Impact Study also reflected outcomes reported by several Family Justice Centers with survivors describing nearly 100% satisfaction with services received and statistically significant increases in survivor-defined goal attainment, empowerment, and hope.

Essex County Family Justice Center regularly solicits feedback from clients through exit surveys and focus groups. Some comments received on exit surveys include:

“This is the safest place to feel everything – the pain, shame, fear and healing.”

“The availability of resources lets you know that you are not alone.”

“I feel safer as a result of the services offered.”

“The Family Justice Center changed my life.”