



CHANGING SYSTEMS
TRANSFORMING LIVES



COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT: CALIFORNIA

Across the country, communities are disarming domestic violence offenders by implementing and enforcing firearm prohibitions in domestic violence cases. Leaders and innovators in these communities have developed pragmatic and responsible policies, protocols and practices directed at all aspects of firearm surrender and seizure.

BWJP

San Mateo County, CA

California leads the nation with some of the strictest laws on guns.

Since 2004, anyone served with a temporary protective order is given only 24 hours to turn over any weapons to local law enforcement or sell them to a licensed gun dealer. Even with some of the toughest gun surrender laws on the books, enforcement of the legislation was uneven. One community set out to change that.

A pilot program saving lives

In 2006, the state set up pilot programs to increase enforcement in San Mateo County, just outside of San Francisco, and Butte County, a largely rural area north of Sacramento. In 2007, the San Mateo Sheriff created the Domestic Violence Firearms Compliance Unit to track, investigate and enforce Domestic Violence Protective Court Orders directing the seizure and storage of surrendered firearms. The money for the original program dried up in 2010, however, San Mateo sought alternate funding to continue the program because it believed that the program was saving lives.

A gatekeeper is key to San Mateo's program success

One key component of San Mateo's efforts is their gatekeeper, Detective Bridgette Heffelfinger, a San Mateo deputy sheriff in the Domestic Violence Firearms Compliance Unit. Everyday Detective Heffelfinger scans the civil protective orders coming out of family court, looking for any mention of guns and violence. She also checks to see if those incidents have ever been reported to law enforcement. If the reports are unclear she will contact the person protected by the order to find out more. This also allows Detective Heffelfinger to make a personal connection with the victim and provide referrals to available services. If the reports clearly indicate use, presence, or threat of firearms, Deputy Heffelfinger has good grounds to ask the court for a search warrant to confiscate the firearms if they haven't been properly surrendered.

Training is an important component to consistency in implementation

The Domestic Violence Firearms Compliance Unit in conjunction with Community Overcoming Relationship Abuse (CORA) developed a training program for local law enforcement and partnering agencies to educate on the pilot project procedures and the relevant firearms and domestic violence issues. Jim Granucci, a former police chief, now with CORA, provides training to law enforcement officers. In San Mateo county, there are 20 different law enforcement agencies. Keeping all of those agencies informed on law and policy changes as well as making sure new recruits understand the dynamics of domestic violence falls into the capable hands of Jim Granucci. Through CORA, Jim offers a 90 minute training for all new officers on domestic violence. Additionally he offers on-going POST training that includes having a survivor of

domestic violence speak to the officers and answer their questions. He also attends briefings at the 20 agencies to update officers in the field on gun law changes.