

Domestic violence targeted; Variety of agencies working together on Greenbook Initiative

By Monika Kleban, Staff Writer

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A new initiative has been launched in St. Louis County to help victims of domestic violence. And while it certainly is not the first endeavor with that goal, the approach of the so-called Greenbook Initiative is different.

The idea is to improve services – through better cooperation – of different agencies dealing with domestic violence and child maltreatment, director Norma Ellington-Twitty said. Members of the Greenbook Initiative have three years and \$1 million to work on their goal. The Greenbook Initiative is a collaboration of the St. Louis County Family Court; the St. Louis County Children Services Division of the Missouri Division of Family Services; and area domestic violence service providers. Funds are provided by the federal government.

“Out of 100 applications, six sites were chosen for this project,” Ellington-Twitty said. “St. Louis County was one of them.”

So far, the Greenbook Initiative is in the planning stage. Ellington-Twitty has occupied her new office, 8700-A Manchester Road in Brentwood, less than two months. The walls still smell of fresh paint. Yet, she has been talking to many members of the courts, child-welfare services, domestic violence service providers and law enforcement agencies, she said. All groups are thrilled with the effort, she said, “but everybody asks the same thing: What are you actually going to do?”

The idea behind the Greenbook Initiative is to get all groups around one table, she said. “They are all trying to help, but often their work is based on different philosophies,” she said. “(When) dealing with domestic violence, one group might be focused on empowering a battered mother, while the other group focuses more on protecting the children.” She said victims of domestic violence should not be re-victimized by having to deal with a confusing system.

The Greenbook Initiative’s name refers to a publication by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. The book – bound by a green cover – provides principles and recommendations to better serve families in need. “The Greenbook gives us a starting point,” Ellington-Twitty said.

Representatives of roughly 30 area agencies will get together July 9 for a planning retreat, she said. “We want to get input from all sides – administrators as well as people who have experienced domestic violence,” she said. Her goal for the retreat is to develop a vision of what a better system would look like, Ellington-Twitty said. “There are very complex dynamics behind domestic violence,” she said. “The more input we have, the better we can understand, the better our outcome will be.” Based on the results of the retreat, the next step will be to develop action plans, she said.

St. Louis County Family Court Judge Susan Block is chairwoman of the Greenbook Initiative’s steering committee. “Judge Block initiated the project,” Ellington-Twitty said.

Ellington-Twitty will have a chance June 22 to present the Greenbook Initiative to Employees of the St. Louis County Family Court. “It’s their ‘stop court and train’ day,” she said. The Family Court is scheduled to be closed, while employees participate in a variety of seminars and workshops, she said. “It will be my first chance to introduce the project to a group of hands-on workers,” Ellington-Twitty said.

Ellington-Twitty spent 15 years working as a clinical psychological in direct contact with children and families, she said. Although her work now is coordinating the efforts of various agencies, she tries not to forget about the people she is ultimately trying to help, she said.

“I hear the cries of children,” she said. “That’s what motivates me to action.”