

# City of Chicago Domestic Violence Help Line

## Background

### History

- In 1997, Mayor Daley's Domestic Violence Advocacy Coordinating Council (DVACC) and the Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence (MODV) completed its *Assessment of the Current Response to Domestic Violence in Chicago*. Gaps in the provision of services and the need for a central source for victim information, resources, and referral links were identified.
- In 1998, the City of Chicago Domestic Violence Help Line began operation. The intent was to alleviate the frustrating and often tedious search for services by victims and those who respond to victim's request for help such as police officers.
- The Illinois Domestic Violence Act of 1986 mandated the police department to give a domestic violence referral to the victim in all domestic violence related calls. The Help Line gives officers a single phone number to access all domestic violence services in Chicago. Giving the Help Line number is now mandatory protocol for police officers.
- Since its inception, the Help Line is a public-private collaboration between the City's Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence (MODV) and the Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women's Network (CMBWN), a private coalition of domestic violence agencies.

### Help Line Operations

- The City's Help Line operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and is a toll free, multi-lingual, confidential service that functions as a clearinghouse for all domestic violence services in the metropolitan area.
- Victim Information and Referral Advocates (VIRAs), employed by the CMBWN answer calls received at the Help Line and provide general domestic violence information, referral and linkage between victims and domestic violence community based services and public responders.
- VIRAs are trained domestic violence advocates who provide information and options available for the victim to make her own informed decision about her situation.
- VIRAs collect basic information from each caller including demographics and service needs (not victim identifying information). Call information recorded into a database includes victim and abuser demographic information, presence of children, referral source, services requested, and the zip code of the caller.
- Based on the service need the VIRA searches an up to date database containing domestic violence service provider agency information. Once a referral is identified, a direct three way phone link can be made between the Help Line caller, the VIRA and the community based service to ensure that callers get connected directly to the program. If the caller prefers or the agency is closed, the domestic violence agency's phone number is offered.
- MODV analyzes the administrative data for trends and gaps in service and publishes annual reports including caller demographics and other highlights.