



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CRISIS CENTER

INNOVATION**STORY**

NO. 2

STORY

MORGAN

MERCER

LOCATION

MINOT,

ND

The oil boom has brought significant increases in population to rural North Dakota and a more than 100 percent increase in the number of women seeking assistance from the Domestic Violence Crisis Center (DVCC), the only agency in a 100-mile radius that provides crisis services and emergency food, clothing and shelter to women and children fleeing domestic violence.



LEADER
JILL MCDONALD

BUDGET
\$1M–\$4,999,999

GEOGRAPHY
NORTH DAKOTA,
NATIVE NATIONS

YEARS ACTIVE
FOUNDED IN 1977

DVCC EMPOWERS VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT BY PROVIDING A FULL RANGE OF SERVICES AND SUPPORT THAT ENCOURAGES PERSONAL GROWTH AND INCLUSION IN ALL ASPECTS OF COMMUNITY LIFE.

BREAKTHROUGH

The New Beginnings Campus represents an audacious strategy to support survivors of domestic violence. With it, DVCC centralized all of its services at a single location. The highly visible campus not only increases safety for clients, but adds much needed space to DVCC's facilities to meet growing demand.

TEAMING UP ON THE BIG PICTURE

DVCC doesn't work in isolation. Instead, it has developed a network of partners through staff who join outside boards or committees that align with DVCC's work. The unprecedented cooperation and support among local organizations means more people are able to find the help they need.

CENTRALIZED HOUSING REVOLUTIONIZES SAFETY

By housing its services at one location, DVCC utilizes staff time more efficiently, reduces gas costs, improves security and increases support of women across its programs. Its innovative campus is only one of four like it across the country, and reflects an evolution in practices to better support survivors.

BUILDS RELATIONSHIPS



EMBODIES COLLABORATION



COMMITTS TO COMMUNITY



STRENGTHENING SOULS

For the first time in years, Amelia did something she never dared to do while married: She went to a movie by herself, bought her snack of choice and picked out where she wanted to sit in the theater. Then she sat back and enjoyed the show. This time Amelia wasn't afraid. No one told her what to do anymore.

"I found my soul again," Amelia says. "I can go where I want to go now. I can do things I want to do. I don't have to be at his beck and call."

The abuse started during the last four years of Amelia's marriage. Domination. Manipulation. Verbal abuse. Control. One time Amelia's husband hit her so hard he almost knocked her out. Her friends didn't believe her. Amelia thought she might kill herself, but her path started to change after her husband kicked her out of the house. She went to the police station where an officer handed her a card with DVCC's contact information printed on it.

She arrived on campus just days later.



After a night in the emergency shelter, she moved into her daughter's home. Yet every week since, she has returned to DVCC for its support group. Thanks to the strength she finds there, life is once again a series of choices Amelia gets to make for herself.

"He took my soul from me," Amelia says. "But since I've been here with these ladies, I've been a different person. I found me again."

Image: Campus Bedroom

"WE'RE WHERE WE ARE TODAY BECAUSE OF THE GENEROSITY OF PEOPLE SHARING THEIR FINANCES, MONEY AND TALENT. IT'S USING ALL OF THAT EXPERTISE AROUND YOU. IT'S THE WAY TO GO."

—DENA FILLER, FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DVCC

TEAMING UP ON THE BIG PICTURE

When Lori called the police after leaving her abuser, the

dispatcher who answered her call knew exactly what to do. She gave Lori the number to DVCC. Within minutes, two of the center's volunteers picked her up at the local gas station.

"Such a load dropped off of me," Lori says. "If this place wasn't here, I don't know where I'd be."

At one point, more than half of the center's referrals came from officers at the Minot Police Department, all of whom carry DVCC information cards to hand out while on duty. Until she called, Lori had no idea a place like DVCC existed. Yet for survivors like her, the unprecedented cooperation and support between DVCC and local law enforcement has meant more people have received the help they needed.

"You just can't isolate yourself and expect to do the work," says Dena Filler, who served as DVCC's executive director for more than 25 years. "You have to build those relationships and have those tough conversations."

DVCC developed its network by asking staff to join outside boards or committees that aligned with their passions and overlapped with the organization's domestic violence work. Tara Bjornson, the center's assistant director, leads the Coordinated Community Response Team. It's a domestic violence task force that brings together 18 organizations across the Minot area, including social service agencies and the local Air Force base. Through it, DVCC and local law enforcement joined up with the hospital to resurrect the Sexual Assault Response Team. Together, the group hammered out a new protocol to better assist and centralize services around survivors who visit the emergency room after an attack.

With investments from its partners, DVCC financed its biggest project to date: the organization's centralized campus. As Dena plotted out her vision, she began to



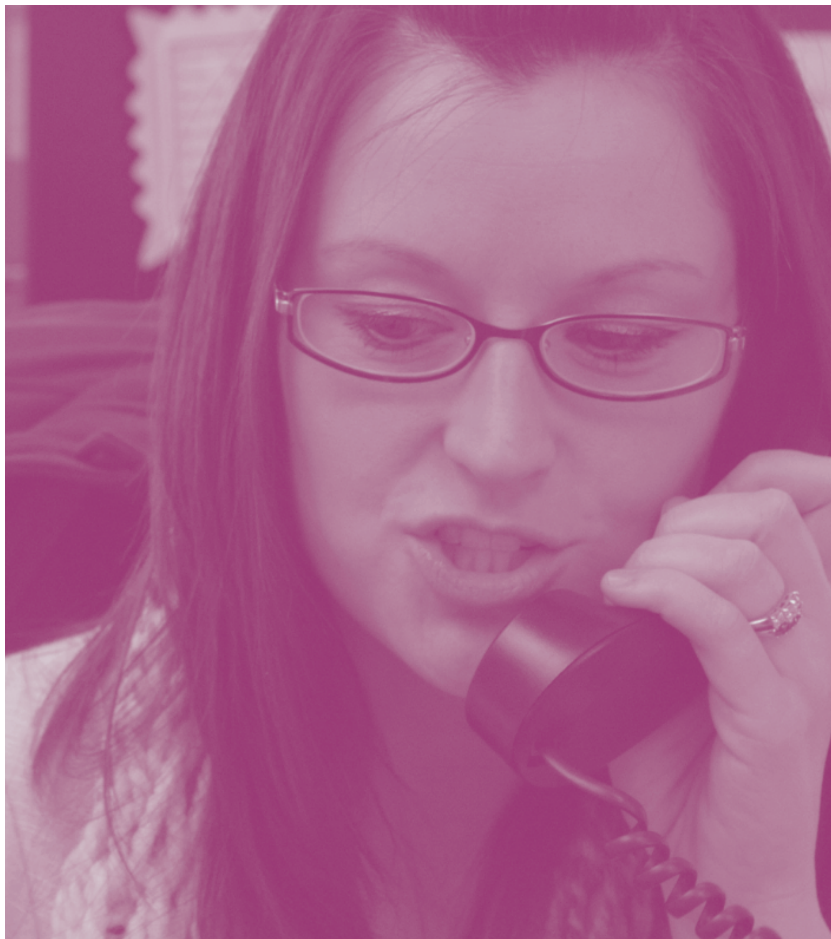
EMBODIES COLLABORATION

Committees like the task force provide neutral ground for local organizations to come together on the same side of an issue. During meetings, agencies educate others about their work and ask how they can collaborate better. Keeping the lines of communication open puts survivors', not individuals', agendas at the center of domestic violence work. In the aftermath of the oil boom, those established relationships led to an informal network of churches, nonprofits and coalitions that chipped in resources and money to a community pool. The shared money paid for domestic violence survivors to get home and find a place to stay after North Dakota's oil economy bottomed out.

rally support through quiet conversations with people in the community.

“To build a campus like we were dreaming about, I knew I needed to go out and get expertise,” says Dena. “We asked people for advice and guidance on how to proceed. It was those types of relationships that brought new people in.”

One connection opened the door to another, and soon three organizations—Minot Area Community Foundation, Margaret A. Cargill Foundation and Otto Bremer Trust—committed substantial grants to build the campus. Then, several local businesses and churches volunteered to cover the costs of furnishing the living rooms and bedrooms in all eight apartments on campus. With that, DVCC cut the ribbon on its innovative new model of care and opened a safe space to those in the Minot area who need it. “I’m not on a sinking ship anymore,” says Sue, who felt so overwhelmed when she first arrived that she didn’t know how to put her life back into drive and move forward. However, like other survivors, living at DVCC gave her a chance to wipe the slate clean and replace her fear and anxiety with hope.



BUILDS RELATIONSHIPS

When local organizations butt heads, Dena sets up in-person meetings or schedules in-house training sessions or presentations to explain what staff is doing and why. “You don’t want to [discuss the situation] casually through an email or phone call,” says Dena. “Make an appointment to sit down so they have to look you in your eyes and tell you why things are or aren’t happening.” Often, that additional explanation tips the scales in favor of a more considerate and symbiotic relationship. For DVCC, that “aha moment” happened when it taught a law enforcement agent about victim mentality. DVCC explained that survivors often return to their abusers seven times before they’re ready to leave. That fact gave the officer a new perspective on how to work with the women she met and reserve judgement when she visited the same survivor’s home multiple times.

**CENTRALIZED HOUSING
REVOLUTIONIZES SAFETY**

“Oh no, not again,” Sue thinks. Her anxiety rises. After Sue left her abuser, the harassing text messages started to pour in. She found a fresh start at the transitional living apartments on DVCC’s central campus, but still there are some nights when panic gets the best of her and she imagines she hears the “message received” noise beeping on her cellphone with threatening texts from her abuser.

“When they move here, it may be the first time they’ve been on their own away from their abuser, and that’s tough,” says Tara. “Having those apartments right here is really helpful. If they’re having a bad night they can go down and talk to somebody. It’s not like they’re stuck out some place by themselves.”

DVCC’s emergency shelter, which is staffed 24 hours a day, sits just across the parking lot from its eight transitional living apartments. In just a few minutes, women like Sue can run down from their apartment, work through a problem with an advocate and then go back to bed. DVCC’s New Beginnings Campus project is an innovative model that brings all of its services to one central location, and it’s only one of four campuses like it across the country.

“IF YOU GO ONE WAY AND THAT DOOR IS CLOSED, GO AROUND AND GO THROUGH THE BACK DOOR. IT’S THE RELATIONSHIPS THAT YOU GROW AND MAINTAIN OVER THE YEARS THAT ALLOW YOU TO DO THAT.”

—DENA FILLER, DVCC

It’s a far cry from the way DVCC used to operate. Before the new campus opened in 2014, DVCC had four locations spread throughout the city—two apartment buildings, an emergency shelter and its offices. The old emergency shelter could comfortably house 13, but routinely packed in up to 25 women who slept on air mattresses and pull-out couches. Staff struggled to monitor security issues when abusers showed up at the transitional living apartments. Transportation between locations proved to be a nightmare, too, often taking four hours to drive survivors to and from a two-hour support group session.

Those old frustrations are gone now. DVCC’s centralized campus led to more efficient use of staff time, a reduction in gas costs, improved security and increased support of women across its programs. Its larger emergency shelter has capacity for three times as many women, which is space the center needed after the Souris River flood in 2011 and the Bakken oil boom in 2012. The accumulation of stress, housing shortages and false promises of work drove more than 89% more women to DVCC’s doors over the last five years.

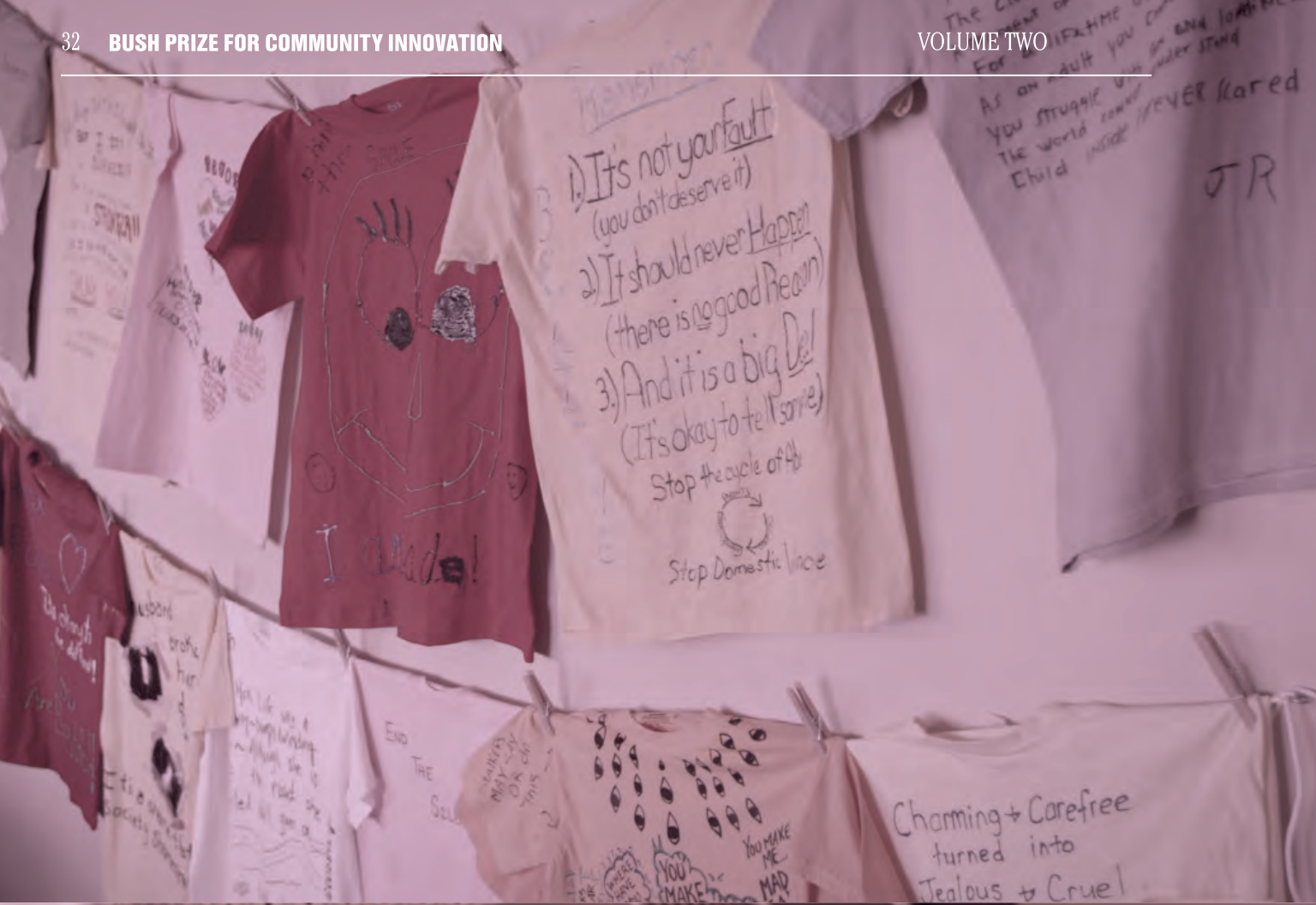
“When you don’t know about places like this it’s like being on the Titanic and there aren’t enough lifeboats. You’re going down and you can’t survive without that rescue,” says Sue, who moved into one of DVCC’s apartments in August. “I was rescued by this place. It means everything.”

The new campus is a bold statement that reflects the evolution of domestic violence services. In the early days, DVCC hid its shelter and housing locations to protect the safety of survivors. Now, a highly visible central campus with new security systems creates a safer haven for survivors like Sue who have a bed to call their own and a place that helps put their lives back on track.



COMMITTS TO COMMUNITY

Even with its home base in Minot, DVCC still intended to serve survivors throughout four counties. With only a single office location, putting that into practice proved difficult. To get help, clients needed to find a ride to DVCC’s campus no matter how far they lived from Minot. Dena and her staff saw a problem with that. They knew survivors couldn’t always get to them, so they found a way to get to their clients. DVCC established four outreach offices in rural communities around the Minot area, like Mohall and Kenmare to the north, and Towner and Rugby to the east. With these offices, DVCC was able to put resources and domestic violence advocates on the ground and build inroads in towns that were farther removed and often overlooked.





Images: DVCC Interior