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Center for Women and Families closing Southern Indiana shelter, starting mobile advocacy unit

By [LISA HORNING](#) | September 28, 2018 9:00 am



Indiana campus of the Center for Women and Families will close, but mobile advocacy for domestic and sexual violence victims will continue. | Courtesy of Center for Women and Families

The Center for Women and Families, an organization that helps those affected by domestic and sexual violence, is closing its 10-room shelter in Southern Indiana and switch to a new model called mobile advocacy.

The mobile advocacy model will still give women the option of a place to stay to escape their abusers, but it won't be in the current 24-hour shelter in New Albany, said Shelley McDonald, director of the center's Southern Indiana campus. The last residents of the New Albany shelter will be transitioned out by the end of 2018.

"We are still very committed to safety and making sure that each individual and family that needs our services get what they need and to talk with them to see how we best provide that," McDonald said. "For the folks who are needing shelter because they're in high lethality situations — high lethality, meaning they are at risk for being killed because of an incident that has just occurred — we want to get them out of that situation."

The Center for Women and Families is the only domestic violence and rape crisis center in its nine-county Kentuckiana service area. Indiana residents who need to be in a shelter can still use the Louisville shelter, which has about 80 beds, she said. And if needed, some clients seeking a safe place to stay will be put into hotel rooms.

The new model is just a more tailored way to help each client



individually, McDonald said.

"There is another population of clients that — and we hear this on our crisis line a lot — 'I don't know if I'm in an abusive relationship,' " McDonald said. "But this is what's happening, and it turns out that they are. So, some of those folks aren't even reaching out for support, and we want to be able to reach all survivors. Being more present and mobile in the community is going to allow us to do that."

Another aspect of the mobile support model is the prevention of domestic violence, she said, meaning education in local schools about preventing violence and advocacy, such as the **Green Dot Initiative** against violence. It also means helping clients get out of violent situations and preventing their murders, which is most likely to happen within a few days of a violent incident.

“This is something we hope to move toward as we begin our new program,” McDonald said. “Enlisting local law enforcement to be trained and help is how this approach works best.”

On average, nearly [20 people per minute](#) are physically abused by an intimate partner in the United States, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. During one year, this equates to more than 10 million women and men.

One in three women and one in four men have been victims of physical violence by an intimate partner within their lifetime, according to the CDC. One in four women and one in seven men have been victims of severe physical violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime.

While there is still a need for shelter options, not every domestic violence victim can or wants to come to a shelter, McDonald added. They might not be able to move away from their workplace, move their kids away from their school or even want to move away from their abusive partner, but the mobile advocacy option helps the Center work with victims in ways that simply housing them in a shelter can't.

Shelters have their own set of problems, she said.

“The thing about shelter is, it's challenging when you have so many different ideas and beliefs and values under one roof,” McDonald said. “Some people have an idea of what good parenting is, or what clean is, and that can lead to altercations. It can also be very isolating when people come to shelter. We've had clients who are like, ‘Oh no no no, I'm not leaving, I'm not going outside. I'm never leaving these walls.’ That's unrealistic because at some point they have to, and so that's sometimes a barrier to moving forward.”

Working with people more closely, McDonald hopes, will help break abuse cycles that run through generations.

“We have so many people who have come to shelter time and time again, for different reasons,” she said. “Sometimes the same abuser, sometimes a different abuser. We have people who bring their children, and those children come back as adults. We want to end that generational cycle of violence, so those children don't grow up to be survivors of domestic violence or abusers.”

It's estimated that more than [15 million children](#) are exposed to domestic violence in the United States annually, and

researchers believe that witnessing domestic violence may be just as harmful to children as being victims of abuse themselves. Studies show that children exposed to domestic violence are more likely to be in abusive relationships as early as adolescence.

If you or someone you know is a victim of domestic or sexual violence, call the emergency hotline at 1-844-273-2331, or visit TheCenterOnline.org.

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Lisa Hornung a native of Louisville and has worked in local media for more than 15 years as a writer and editor. Before that she worked as a writer, editor and photographer for community newspapers in Kansas, Ohio and Kentucky. She has a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Georgia, and after a 20-year career in journalism, she obtained a master's degree in history from Eastern Kentucky University in 2016.



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