

Tucson City Court's Domestic Violence Mentor Court Continues Outreach

Over the past several years, Tucson City Court's Domestic Violence Court has worked with partners Emerge! Center Against Domestic Abuse and Community Outreach Program for the Deaf (COPD) to provide education and outreach to the Deaf community in the area of domestic violence. Emerge! has improved their access and services for Deaf victims, COPD has improved their staff's education in the area of domestic violence, and the Court has provided trainings, has collaborated with both partners and has made the courthouse more accessible.

February 2, 2018, the Court worked with Emerge!, COPD, the Tucson Police Department and the City Prosecutors and Public Defenders office to host COPS, COURTS, and COFFEE- an outreach for the Deaf community. In our work with the Deaf community, we soon learned that the first responders were setting the tone- often there are not interpreters available, often the victim is Deaf and the perpetrator is not, and thus he tends to control the direction of the conversations. In order for Deaf victims to feel safe enough to involve the system, they need to feel safe calling the police- otherwise the perpetrators are never arrested and the case never makes it into the court system, where we now have trained court staff and victim advocates available.

The Tucson Police Department's Special Victims section was completely responsive after hearing the Court's proposal and they worked hard to plan the event with the Court. The police department and the court provided doughnuts and coffee for the event, and Emerge! helped provide for a video compilation to be played that evening. The videos consisted of DV education videos from the DeafHope organization, scenarios of encounters between Deaf citizens and police officers, and videos made by the partners about the services available to Deaf victims in our community.

We had more than 100 people come by! The police officers were very popular, especially two of the officers who spoke a little ASL. Our public defenders and prosecutors answered questions and spoke to public members also, as did the Judge and our protective order staff person, COPD and Emerge!

It was a great example of Tucson city departments working together to connect with our community and increase access to the Justice system for under-served individuals.