



Legal Services Committee
January 20, 2022

Amy Smith	HCDVCC
Thecia Jenkins	HCDVCC
Amy Johnson	HCDVCC
Rebecca Councill	HCDVCC
Jacklyn Guerra	HAWC
Angela Maskevich	BATP
Jessica Howton	Tahirih Justice Center
Katharina Dechert	Tahirih Justice Center

Amy Smith opened the meeting and everyone provided updates on their agencies

HAWC- Shelter is opened but with social distancing. Admin Building is closed to Staff only. Most services are virtual expect they are still doing Court and Law Enforcement interviews in person and virtually. Some Family Courts are holding court in person but they survivors prefer using virtual platforms so they do not have to be in the same room as the abuser. HAWC has seen mixed results in the Family Courts with PO's and other family law issues. Have had some really good experiences and some really bad ones. Their advocates are screening more thoroughly on PO to weed out those cases that do not meet the criteria for the D.A.'s Office. They are no longer filling all of their slots provided by the COP program of the D.A.'s Office. They have a partnership with AVDA to help fill that gap.

Tahirih- all of their services are virtual. The Immigration Courts are slowly starting to open up but it is changing daily. It has some occasional in person hearings but not many. Tahirih has an extremely low capacity to accept new clients but they are still advising on the phone. The new UVISA policy created by JAD is not being widely used by Law Enforcement Agencies but it is a starting point to try and get agencies to actually write down their policies. UVISA's still have a cap of 10,000 per calendar year for the entire country and there is currently a 5 + year waiting period. The government is working through the backlog from 2016 forward trying to tentatively certify some so they can get a Modified Work Permit. The Immigration Crime Victim Working Group is trying to raise interest at the Federal level to raise the cap of the numbers of UVISA. Interestingly the quote on TVISAs has not been met because agencies have a hard time certifying Trafficking cases. It is often easier to charge on a specific crime instead of charging someone with trafficking.

BATP- They are seeing clients in person but are having a hard time getting PO's for their clients. They have found that some clients are trying to get divorces on their own. Jackie suggested they use the Harris County Clerk's website to help assess their cases.

HCDVCC- Amy Johnson reported she has been in trial and it has been difficult to move forward. The jury is spread out in the audience and there is only a small space for spectators including the victim's family. Harris County is allegedly going to go back to the Jury Assembly Room to pick juries instead of picking them at NRG in February. Courts are limiting the number of people in the Courtroom and not sure when that will be changed.

Discussion - Training for Legal Advocates. A training for legal advocates 101 was discussed about how to properly assess a case, what to tell the client, etc. Thecia, Jackie and Amy J will be working on setting that up with possible speakers Leeja from DVD, Jackie from HAWC and someone from AVDA.

Meetings will continue to be on the third Thursdays of the month at 11:30. Amy Smith will send out a recurring calendar invite. Next meeting February 17th.