

## A Powerful Advocate For Women In Distress

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Every outreach organization has a human face, a person whose passion for the serious task of helping others and even saving lives propels the entire group to accomplish great things. For the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV), Karen Jarmoc is that person.

"She has the ability to set the bar higher and get people involved," said David Bogan, a Robinson & Cole partner who is also on the coalition's board. "She's extremely smart and because of her background as a legislator, she knows the political landscape and she has relationships that really cannot be duplicated."

Jarmoc, a former state legislator, was tapped to be the interim executive director of CCADV last year. She succeeded Erika Tindill, a former prosecutor and legal aid lawyer, who was picked by Gov. Dannel P. Malloy to chair the state Board of Pardons and Paroles. Tindill said when she left, she lobbied for Jarmoc to be her replacement, and this year Jarmoc became the organization's full-time leader. "I had worked with Karen when she was a legislator and she was always very supportive of domestic violence issues," Tindill said. "Her political experience building collaboration and partnership made her perfect. I strongly recommended her to the board."

In the year since Jarmoc took the helm, the coalition has increased its efforts to strengthen domestic violence laws. In recognition of its efforts to help women, change public policy and oversee vital community programs, the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence will receive the Law Tribune's Publisher's Award at Honors Night ceremonies on June 14th. Among its accomplishments last year, the coalition and its 18 member programs that run centers and shelters statewide sponsored a successful discussion forum for lawyers. Members of the coalition, the Connecticut Bar Association and the Judicial Branch pointed out the dangers faced by battered women. Propelling that message was the fact that about 16 Connecticut women are killed by abusers each year, many of them knowing nothing about shelters and other programs that may have helped them. In one six-week period last year, five women lost their lives.

The impact on children was also a renewed focus. According to a report on child fatalities published by the coalition last year, five children were killed along with their mothers in domestic violence incidents across Connecticut in the past decade. Even the children who aren't killed can be permanently scarred; the report found changes in brain chemistry and development. "Far too many people are impacted by this," Jarmoc said.

Together, coalition members pushed for the creation of a statewide model policy for law enforcement agencies when officers respond to domestic violence calls. And CCADV's publicity efforts this year helped persuade lawmakers to approve longer restraining orders against potential abusers. The limit, once six months, has been extended to a one year.

Jarmoc is the first person to say she didn't do it alone. But she has a knack for getting people to get involved, "or more involved," said Bogan, the attorney who got involved with the coalition in 1994. At the time, Bogan, whose practice focuses on utilities, worked with the telephone company to develop ways to protect abused women who tried to call for help. The advent of caller ID had made it easier for abusers to see who domestic violence victims had been in contact with. "We came up with a credit card that could be used only by the person who needed to make that call, and so the number they called couldn't be identified," Bogan said. He stayed involved and became a board member after Jarmoc was named director. Bogan said he's motivated by the widespread and hidden nature of domestic violence. "People don't like to talk about it much, but many of the people we come in contact with, through business and family situations, are in situations where their safety is at risk," Bogan said.

In spreading the word about the need to protect women from domestic violence, CCADV has also helped support other agencies that rely on public funding to represent low income women in court, including Connecticut Legal Services. "One of the things that's been great is that Karen Jarmoc and many of the member agencies were very active in the efforts to get the increased funding for legal services," said Steve Eppler-Epstein, executive director of CLS.

Jarmoc developed her knack for spreading the word about domestic violence early on. In 1991, when she was 25, she became policy director for the Network Against Domestic Abuse, which serves domestic violence victims in her hometown of Enfield. Jarmoc said the agency had an attitude back then "that domestic violence was a quiet issue." "So what I tried to do, is break down that barrier," she said. Jarmoc invited the media to the shelter, a move which she said was "unheard of at the time." In her mind, however, getting people to understand those who were affected by domestic violence was key to building financial support. They held a press conference with Sen. Joe Lieberman, who visited the shelter, she said, "which resulted in this amazing photograph in the Hartford Courant of Joe talking with a woman. It was really powerful." Other politicians started getting interested as well. As a result, funding was increased to keep the program afloat. "That was sort of a pivotal moment," Jarmoc said.

Life pulled Jarmoc in other directions. She had twins, earned a master's degree in public policy at Trinity College and served in the General Assembly from 2007 until 2011. After she lost a bid for a state Senate seat, she got a call from the CCADV board. Returning to the world of domestic violence advocacy, Jarmoc's first task was working on a report about women killed as the result of domestic violence. "We didn't have the money to do billboards," she said of the 18 domestic violence agencies throughout the state, for which the coalition provides training and funnels funding from government and private sources.

Rolling up her sleeves, Jarmoc started by reviewing statistical reports on domestic violence fatalities which had been completed annually for a decade but had received little publicity. She organized a 15-member examination team to focus on training and media coverage of the problem. Jarmoc and her coalition used that information to push members of the legal community to get involved.

The coalition worked with the Connecticut Bar Association and state Judicial Branch to conduct a training session and forum. Barry Armata, a partner with Brown, Paindiris & Scott in Hartford, was then chair of the family law section for the Connecticut Bar Association. In the one-day forum in March 2011, prosecutors, judges and lawyers all shared thoughts on the issues surrounding domestic violence. "With domestic violence, some people think it is everywhere and there are those who downplay the problem," Armata said. "We all got together to share information. Lawyers came away with a better understanding of how to assess a case. And if you have a client who is trying to get a restraining order, we talked about how to create a safety plan."

To be sure, Connecticut's focus on domestic violence laws did not start this year or last. As far back as 1986, the state began looking seriously at the issue, spurred by the stabbing death of Torrington's Tracey Thurman by her abusive husband. But budgetary pressures have blunted some of the progress over the years. Recent momentum began building in 2010, when the Judicial Branch used \$140,000 in federal stimulus money for GPS tracking devices for repeat domestic-violence offenders. The technology led to quicker notification of protective-order violations – but the money ran out last year.

Thanks to the efforts of CCADV and a renewed attention on domestic violence, advocates hope to secure more funding for shelters and other programs, said state Rep. Mae Flexer of Danielson, who chairs the House Speaker's Task Force on Domestic Violence. Flexer and Speaker Christopher Donovan this year made 20 recommendations, including the extension of restraining orders. Also passed into law was an increase in the number of courthouses with domestic violence dockets and an improved notification process for victims when an offender's incarceration status changes. The task force, which worked closely with CCADV, also recommended maintaining funding for 24-hour staffing at shelters throughout the state, which is always a challenge. Flexer credited the work of CCADV, and its report on domestic violence fatalities, with making those initiatives possible. "Completely," she said. "The work of that commission was eventually brought to the speaker's task force and we took many of those recommendations and put them into legislation we passed this year."



Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence: Publisher's Award recipients.

Front Row (from the left) Tanya Meck, a senior vice president at Global Strategy Group, CCADV Executive Director Karen Jarmoc, State Rep. Mae Flexer, Chair Speaker's Task Force on Domestic Violence. Back Row: Tony Berry, Global Strategies, Attorney David Bogan, a member of the Coalition's board.