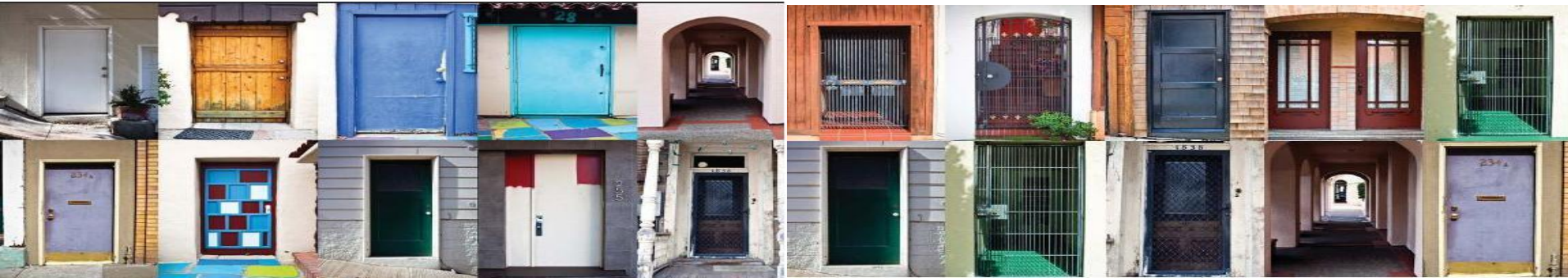
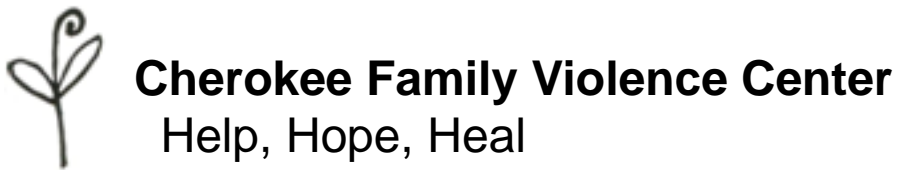




Improving Safety and Services for Survivors of Domestic Violence



Dynamics of Domestic Violence & Homelessness

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Why Talk About DV?

- **DV is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children (families) in the U.S.**
 - **Survivors often must leave housing to escape DV**
 - **May be evicted due to abuser's behavior**
 - **DV interferes with ability to access housing - bad credit, poor rental histories, safety needs**
 - **Abusers sabotage survivor's economic stability - trouble paying deposit, rent and utilities**



Understanding the Dynamics

- DV is a pattern of coercive power and control
- Abuser's behavior often affects survivor's choices and behavior – both to increase her own safety and to cope
- Survivors have real fears, beyond physical safety (ex. deportation; losing custody)
- May seem difficult to identify victim vs. abuser



Identification and Screening

- Some survivors self-identify or are referred by DV agency
- For others... welcome/intake protocol must include asking about DV safely, respectfully, and universally
- Survivor and abuser may show up together, both needing services – program must address safety issues without victim blaming or increasing danger



Common Pitfalls

- Screening out due to danger
- Unintentionally re-victimizing or increasing danger - usually via policies meant to increase safety (ex. requiring a protective order)
- Forgetting the survivor is *the* expert in her own life and situation
- Competing instead of collaborating



A Few Practices to Avoid

- Asking survivor about DV in abuser's presence
- Giving her written materials when it's not safe
- Blaming her for damage or danger caused by the abuser
- Expecting she can "control" his behavior (ex. showing up at her unit uninvited)
- Setting eligibility criteria that prevent access to services or increase danger



Confidentiality: The Cornerstone

- Federally funded programs (VAWA, HUD) have statutory requirements to protect survivor confidentiality
- Best practice is to afford all survivors basic safeguards of confidentiality, regardless of statute or funding (ex. Release of Information)
- Examine all program aspects for breaches of confidentiality – use of technology, sharing paperwork, using personally identifying info. in public, etc.
- When in doubt, ask her. *Which info. is OK to share? Is it OK to leave a message? Should we have a code word?*



Voices from the Field:

On collaborating with DV Programs

“... our founders and early leadership soon discovered that the vast majority of homeless women had experienced co-occurring domestic violence. The homelessness then placed the client at greater risk for partner violence as they may have experienced pressure to cohabitate or continue a relationship to maintain the security of housing...”

“[Collaborating] helps us to provide accurate case management and referrals for our clients. It also helps us highlight and advocate for the unique needs of victims of domestic violence and their children at the intersection of homelessness and domestic violence. It actually makes our jobs easier.”



A Few Resources

- National Coalition Against Domestic Violence - www.ncadv.org
- State DV Coalitions - www.ncadv.org/resources/StateCoalitionList.php
- National Resource Center on Domestic Violence - www.nrcdv.org
- Federal Office on Violence Against Women - www.ovw.usdoj.gov
- The Northwest Network (LGBT survivors) - www.nwnetwork.org
- Institute on DV in the African American Community – www.idvacc.org
- Asian Pacific Islander Institute on DV - www.apiidv.org



Partnerships

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Why develop partnerships

- Staff benefits
- Effective use of resources
- Leverage expertise
- Systems change- organic and strategic – policy recommendations



Mechanics of successful partnerships

- Relevant parties and formal commitment
- Shared problem solving structure
- Evaluation structure- mutually agreeable and beneficial
- Equal rights and shared ownership
- Partner involvement and admission of new partners



Mitigating HMIS issues

- Alternative database options
- Education for the system
- DV agency participation goals



HMIS in Washington State

“Personally identifying information about homeless individuals for the Washington homeless client management system may only be collected after having obtained informed, reasonably time limited written consent from the homeless individual to whom the information relates.”

(State law passed in 2006)



How does data collection work?

- Each agency receiving state, county, and/or federal funds participates in HMIS.
- Victim Services agencies do not enter personally identifying information.
- All agencies are expected to secure “informed, written consent” and to ask about privacy concerns (e.g., domestic violence). If consent is not given or if domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking are identified, personally identifying information is not entered.



How has that impacted data?

- Numbers and outcomes for homeless domestic violence survivors are included in WA State data.
- There is undoubtedly some duplication.
- 14% of the data entries are from DV agencies. (1/1/12-3/31/12)
- 15% of the data entries are from those refusing consent—may include domestic violence survivors in homeless/housing agencies. (1/1/12-3/31/12)



Safety Planning

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Immediate Safety

- Listen to the survivor and ask what s/he needs
- If the abusive partner is also a resident or housing applicant, do not have safety-related conversations with him/her present
- Remember that the victim may use violence—in self defense or to regain control over her/his life
- Utilize your DV agency partnership—either as a referral or for consultation



Conversations

- Safety planning is a process, not a one-time event or check list.
- Safety planning is tailored to the survivor's life and daily activities—each day may even be a little different.
- Ask the survivor what the abuser's power and control tactics are.
- Survivor activities and abuser's tactics will guide the safety planning process.



How Can Your Program Help with Safety?

- Have policies in place with your DV agency partner for emergent needs
- Help the victim with other safe housing resources within your program or another program
- Help the abuser with resources if s/he becomes homeless due to exclusion from the unit
- Don't judge or restrict the level of contact they might need to have with each other



Criminal Legal System

- A good relationship with local law enforcement is necessary for any housing/homeless provider
- Keep in mind that a survivor may not necessarily want law enforcement involvement for many reasons:
 - Immigrant and has fears about police from country of origin
 - Doesn't want partner arrested (income source or potential to be deported)
 - Undocumented immigrant
 - May have warrants
 - From historically oppressed community; police intervention not viewed as helpful or welcome



Civil Legal System

- Protection Orders—order issued by the court as a result of a petition by victim for protection from abuser
- Orders must be observed in any jurisdiction (Full Faith & Credit)
- Survivors may not choose to petition for an order due to safety concerns—important that the program not require her to get a protection order



Long-Term Safety Planning

Once a survivor has obtained alternate/transitional or permanent housing, maintaining safety remains a priority

- Safety at home and with children
- Financial safety and independence
- Safety on the job and in public settings
- Safety if I am using drugs or alcohol



Maintaining Safety at Home and with Children

- Install security mechanisms to include additional locks, bars and electronic security system.
- Have copies of the survivors important documents; birth certificates, insurance information, protection order in an accessible location.
- Teach children how and when to contact emergency personnel; teach children how to communicate with 911 staff.
- Inform good neighbors, school or day car staff and community providers of those who no longer have permission to has access to children.



Maintaining Financial Safety and Independence

- Open a new bank account or use cash to ensure that a survivor can not be traced by the account monitoring.
- Establish a “stash” or savings method in case the survivor may need access to money quick.
- Contact credit bureau and establish a way to monitor credit regularly.
- Protect good credit by contacting company’s to determine a survivors level of responsibility to the debt, establish payment arrangements or request hardship assistance.



Maintaining Safety on the Job and in Public

- A survivor can inform his or her boss or upper management of the situation and request that staff screen calls/visitors.
- Travel with other people when possible.
- Use different travel routes while driving or when using public transportation.
- Use different business than normal; use different banks, grocery stores, malls and restaurants.



Maintaining Safety if a survivor is using Drugs or Alcohol

If a survivor is going to use, he or she should:

- Understand that using can create an unsafe situation with for the survivor and children.
- Plan to use when the survivors children are in a safe place and in the custody of an adult.
- Plan to use in a safe please.
- Plan to ensure that the survivor has a safe way to return home.

When possible attempt the connect the survivor with addictions professionals.



Safety Planning for Staff

“I think the more I learned about domestic violence, the more I realized that I am not really the person at risk.”

- Home Free Advocate



Safety for Staff AND Survivors

- Safety planning is key to all work with survivors – whether in your office, the shelter, the survivor’s home, or in the community
- Thoroughly discuss with each survivor how to best integrate your services into her safety plan
- Know how survivor wants you to handle it if someone she knows sees you together and wonders who you are
- Have a plan for what you’ll say/do if you encounter the abuser
- Avoid doing home visits if:
 - Abuser knows housing location and is not staying away
 - Abuser’s behavior includes stalking/following survivor
- Ensure your program knows where you are
- Follow your instincts and keep your cell phone charged and handy



Best Practices for Advocacy with Domestic Violence Survivors

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Framing the Issue

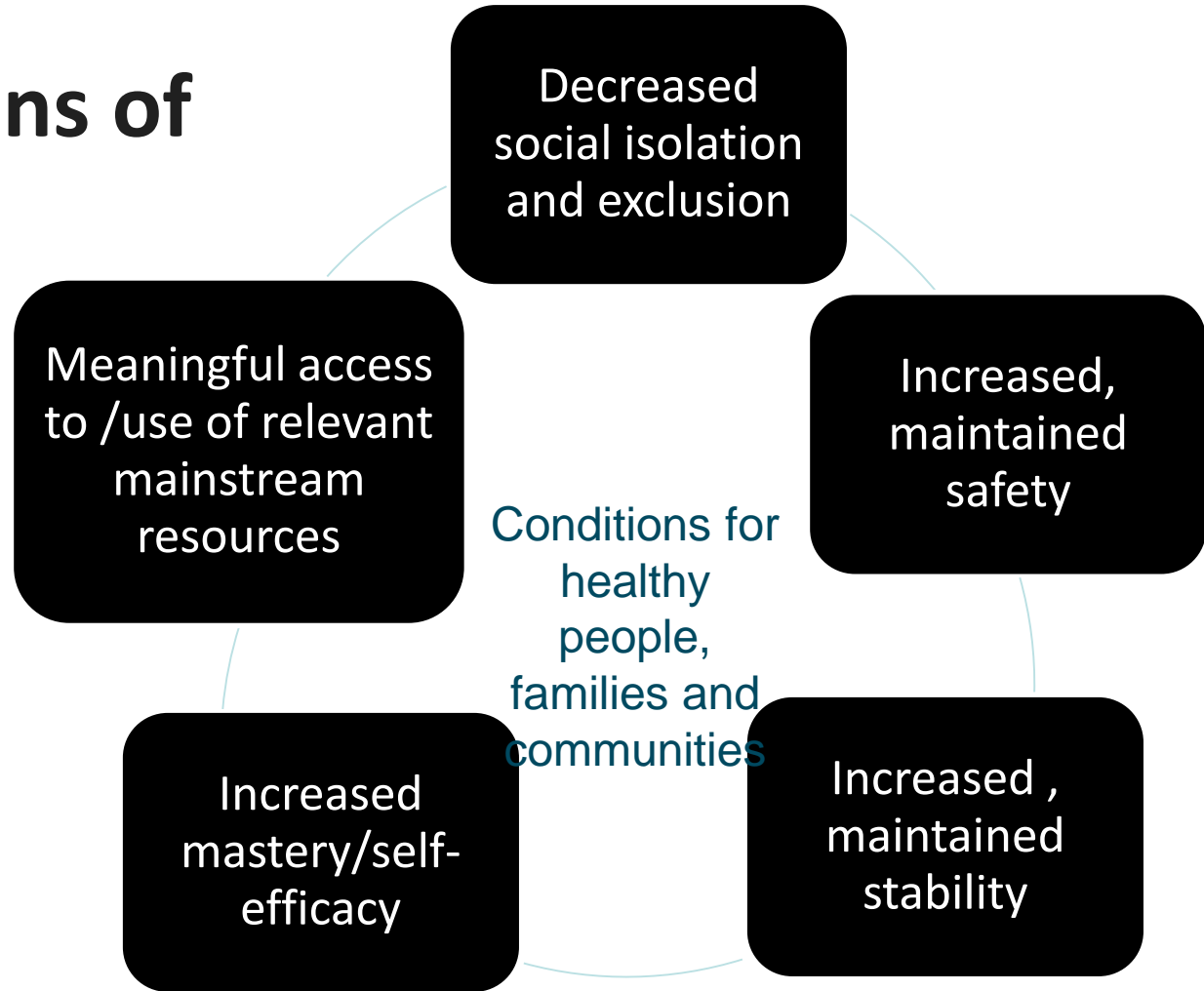
- Ending homelessness is social justice work.
- Safety and housing are basic human rights, not rewards for good behavior/following the rules.
- Building assets in Safety, Stability, Social Connections, Mastery, and Access to Resources affects meaningful, sustainable change. This is the advocate's role.
- Trauma-informed, voluntary services increase program accessibility and participant's self-determination. This is social justice.



What We All Need

five domains of wellbeing

Breaking inter-generational cycles of poverty, violence and trauma requires we simultaneously support progress in these Five Domains – at the individual, family and community levels.



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**“If you have come to help me you are
wasting your time, but if you have
come because your liberation is
bound to mine, let us work together”**

**~ Aboriginal activists group (Lila Watson),
Queensland, 1970s**



Best Practices Foundation

- Trauma Informed
- Strength Based
- Emotional & Physical Safety Oriented
- Voluntary Services Approach – Self Directed



Voluntary Services: One Best Practice

- Based on a philosophy and framework that emphasizes providing information and encouraging *true* choice
- Also called Empowerment Model, Harm Reduction, etc. – term is less important than underlying principles and practices
- Shelter/housing eligibility is NOT contingent upon accessing support services
- Participant-driven and relationship-based
- Intentionally focuses on whole person, including historical and relational context, not a singular issue or deficit



Common Misconceptions

Voluntary Services means:

- No rules, no expectations
- A hands-off approach; participants always have to initiate contact
- Participants will “sit around and do nothing”
- Staff can never intervene, even in a crisis
- No-one can ever be terminated from services
- Never knowing if your program is ‘working’



Voluntary Services in Real Life

- It works!!
- World did not end; anarchy and chaos did not ensue
- Increased participation, in some cases
- Happier staff, happier participants
 - clearer roles and expectations
- More relevant, 'effective' services



Some First Steps

- **Re-visit Eligibility**
 - minimal, objective criteria
 - screen IN not out
- **Examine Rules & Policies**
 - less is often more
 - put them to the test: Effective? Necessary? Respectful? Enforceable?
 - are they helping or eroding building assets in the 5 Domains?



Survivor's Voices

“When a women is in an abusive and controlling relationship and or marriage, their lives really are not their own. In my situation I wasn’t free to make a lot of my own decisions. Once out of this environment I was out physically but not completely out emotionally ... the last thing I would have needed is the very people helping me to now force or mandate that I do what they want me to do. That to me would have been very similar to the situation I had left ... going from one controlling situation right into another! ... My daughter and I have many gifts in our lives and we have many challenges. I like having the freedom to make my own choices, and I believe many other women will move forward in their lives as well, with the gentle guidance verses mandated services by those who are there to help.”



Survivor's Voices

“ I got a call from [program name]...for an interview. At the interview I made sure to ask about their rules in the program. The staff smiled and told me that there were no rules. I cried after the interview because I didn't know that people were out there to help someone like me and not judge me.”



Advocate's Voices

“The VS approach is really based in trust, respect, removing power imbalances and focusing on how we as service providers are more alike than unlike the people we serve.”

“The only insight that I have in doing this work is that you will never figure it all out. Life is messy. Violence and trauma do horrible things to people. Poverty and oppression can bring out the worse in people. We can not develop the perfect set of rules, even the most well intentioned, and guarantee that everything will be perfect ... we cannot and should not control other people. We truly do need to listen to what women are saying that they need. Not what we want them to have.”



Barriers to Effective Advocacy

- Power Differential/Language That We Use
- Office Hours
- Cultural Incompetency
- Location/Transportation/Childcare



Trauma Informed - Barriers

- **Administrative policies and procedures – welcoming participants to program, paperwork, eligibility requirements, etc.**
- **Understanding survivor behavior in context of past/current trauma**
- **Reliance on labels (ex. lazy, co-dependent, unmotivated, deceitful, PTSD, etc.)**



Engagement & Trust-building

With Participants:

- Ask how you can help
- Ask what she wants from your program - touch base regularly, formally and informally
- Build in emotional & physical safety assessment in all aspects of process
- Goals, not just task oriented but feelings attached to task
- Rapport & Relationship Building is Key
 - rely on natural, not created, consequences
 - create meaningful opportunities for participant input



Engagement & Investment

With Staff and Organization:

- Track changes over time (ex. journals)
- Explore and challenge personal biases, values and beliefs
- Measure and reward what's important to your program: what does excellence look like?

With Board, Community Partners, and Funders:

- Build relationships
- Challenge the power structure
- Rethink definition of success; redesign outcomes



Understanding the Abuser's Role

- Does he have visitation?
- Was he the primary babysitter/transportation, etc.?
- Support vs. safety vs. isolation
- Is he sabotaging her efforts?



Food for Thought...

- Relationships are everything!
- True advocacy is *more work, more engagement*, and often messier and more complicated
- Program may need to redefine meaning of Success - for staff and participants



Questions? Comments? Answers?

THANK YOU!

