



## **SECTION 2: CREATING A CULTURE OF WELL-BEING IN DOMESTIC & SEXUAL VIOLENCE ADVOCACY PROGRAMS**

Domestic and sexual violence advocacy programs can be a source of connection, safety, and well-being for survivors and communities. While it's important to understand the impact trauma has on survivors of DSV, to facilitate healing, advocacy programs must also be focused on wellbeing. In addition to asking “What happened to you?,” advocates can also ask, “What matters to you?” DSV programs that are committed to a culture of well-being prioritize care, empowerment, healing, and safety not only for survivors, but also their children, and for program staff. This commitment is reflected in the organization's environment, program design, and staff or employment policies.

### **Minimizing Rules and Barriers to Safety in DSV Advocacy Programs**

Because DSV is rooted in power and control, empowerment and self-determination are keys to safety and healing for survivors of violence. In order to support long-term healing, DSV advocacy programs work to support survivor's autonomy, ability to make

informed decisions, and sense of self-worth and love. Support is achieved not only through the services that are provided to survivors, but how the services are provided. This is especially important for ensuring access for survivors who have stigmatized identities, health conditions, and lived experiences. Many DSV advocacy programs have moved towards voluntary services and low-barrier or low-rules programs set up so that survivors can access care without the same patterns of power and coercion being replicated in their experiences. Some strategies for reducing rules in DSV programs are:

- Apartment style shelter spaces with individual kitchens, bathrooms, and keyed entries,
- Hired cooks and cleaning staff,
- Nighttime security with no curfews for residents,
- Ample space for children to play,
- Services and group activities are offered as options, not requirements,
- Provide residents with lock boxes or hotel-style safes to store medication.

#### *Key Resources:*

- » [Running a Shelter with Minimal Rules | WSCADV](#)
- » [How the Earth Didn't Fly Into the Sun: Missouri's Project to Reduce Rules in Domestic Violence Shelters | MCADSV](#)
- » [Safe, Accessible Housing for Survivors: The Low-Barrier Approach | Safe Housing Partnerships](#)
- » [Building Dignity: Design Strategies for Domestic Violence Shelter | WSCADV](#)

## **Ensuring Access and Inclusion**

DSV advocates are uniquely positioned to understand the complex oppressions of survivors who are living with a disability and are experiencing coercion, abuse or violence. If services are not intentionally inclusive, they are unintentionally exclusive. Not only is robust access a legal requirement, but when DSV advocacy programs are welcoming to survivors who have been marginalized because of their disability, sexuality, the language they speak, body size, it increases access and safety for all survivors. Increasing accessibility improves the effectiveness of your programs, and creates better workplaces for staff.

### Key Resources:

- » [Why should advocates and preventionists incorporate Disability Justice into their work? | VAWnet](#)
- » [Promising Practices for Serving Domestic Violence Survivors with Disabilities | End Abuse Against People with Disabilities](#)
- » [10 Vital Ways to Support Fat Students on Campus](#)
- » [Supporting Deaf and DeafBlind Survivors | Vera Institute](#)
- » [Language Access, Interpretation and Translation Tools | API-GBV](#)
- » [Language Access Planning Tool | Esperanza United](#)
- » [Providing Meaningful Language Access | VAWnet](#)
- » [LGBTQIA+ Resources for Organizations | Anti-Violence Project](#)
- » [National LGBTQ Institute on IPV Resource Library](#)

## A Whole-Family Approach

When survivors seek care and safety through DSV programs, they are often coming with the needs and priorities of the whole family. Because DSV affects more than just the individual survivor, DSV programs have invested in programming and approaches that are supportive to parents, children, people who are using violence, and extended family.

DSV programs with a special focus on serving children who are exposed to violence are taking steps to ensure that their programs are set up for the needs of children and young people.

### Key Resources:

- » [The Guiding Principles to Improve Outcomes for Children, Youth, and Parents Impacted by Family Violence | Promising Futures](#)
- » [Family-Centered Toolkit for Domestic Violence Programs | NCDVTMH](#)
- » [Child Friendly Domestic Violence Shelters | Promising Futures](#)
- » [Protective Factors and Resilience | Promising Futures](#)
- » [Program Design | Promising Futures](#)

Supporting children in DSV programs means having specific offerings in place to support parents as well. This might look like family friendly program design, flexible housing options, resources for parents who are using violence, and practices to reduce harm when making mandated reports. It is important that advocates know what falls under the definition of child abuse/neglect in their state, are clear about their specific reporting obligations, are able to explain a survivor's rights during a child welfare investigation, and supporting the survivor through the process by advocating on a survivor's behalf with child welfare systems.

#### *Key Resources:*

- » [PIVOT Towards Promising Futures: Supporting Parents](#)
- » [Bridges to Better](#)
- » [Abusive Partner Accountability and Engagement | Center for Court Innovation](#)
- » [Mandatory Reporting | Promising Futures](#)
- » [Tipsheet: Advocating at Complex Intersections: Domestic Violence, Substance Use Coercion, and Child Protective Services | NCDVTMH](#)
- » [Making a Mandatory Child Abuse Report \(Washington state specific laws\) | WSCADV](#)

## **Well-Being of Staff is a Part of The Mission**

DSV programs that include the safety, security, and wellbeing of their staff as a part of their mission are adopting a culture of well-being that benefits everyone. It is not enough to acknowledge that many working in the anti-violence movement are also survivors. When staff members feel valued and taken care of, they are more likely to be engaged and supported in their work. This, in turn, leads to better outcomes for clients and staff. Additionally, a focus on worker well-being helps build trust and credibility within the community, allowing more survivors to seek help and stronger collaborations with other community-based programs. These strategies could include ensuring thriving wages and benefits, eliminating oppressive policies and dynamics that impact Black, Indigenous advocates, advocates of color and other marginalized identities, equitable and transparent pay and decision making processes, robust leave policies, employee development opportunities, pathways for career development.

## Key Resources:

- » [Tools for Transformation: Becoming Accessible, Culturally Responsive, and Trauma-Informed Organizations — An Organizational Reflection Toolkit](#)
- » [Implementation Support Guide 1: The Social, Emotional, and Relational Climate and Organizational Trauma](#)
- » [Implementation Support Guide 2: Supporting Change Leadership](#)
- » [Creating Trauma-Informed Services and Organizations: An Integrated Approach](#)
- » [Care for Liberation: Promoting Resilience For DV Advocates](#)
- » [Voices from Our Movement: Ending racism and oppression as the heart of our anti-violence movement](#)
- » [Workplaces Respond Toolkit](#)
- » [#1Thing to #Care4Advocates Mind, Body, and Soul | NRCDV](#)
- » [What Will History Say About You & Your Organization? | NRCDV](#)

### ACRTI Organizations

“Investing in staff and their development is a critical part of creating an accessible, culturally responsive, and trauma-informed (ACRTI) organization. This investment involves creating an organizational culture that honors strength and resilience; attends to disparities related to power, privilege, and oppression; and respects and values staff and their work. It also means recognizing and attending to the impact of trauma on staff and organizations, including the impact of secondary trauma and ongoing oppression. An ACRTI organization provides the support staff need to be present, open, and connected in their interactions with survivors who have many cultural and ethnic identities, and many types of abilities in respectful and collaborative ways”- [Tools for Transformation Toolkit](#)<sup>31</sup>