

BUILDING COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTIONS TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Increasing Economic Opportunity for Battered Women National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

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Along with you, we've been shocked and saddened by the recent passing of Susan Schechter. Among Susan's many contributions were the leadership and vision she provided the Building Comprehensive Solutions to Domestic Violence Initiative (BCS). We will greatly miss her presence and her analysis of the issues of domestic violence and poverty. One way we can honor her life's work and her memory is to continue our advocacy with the same commitment, energy, and integrity that Susan brought to everything she did on behalf of battered women and their children. In that spirit, the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence will continue the work of BCS.

We're pleased to offer this issue of the BCS newsletter, which focuses on the dynamic economic advocacy of the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence – advocacy that evolved with Susan's guidance and mentoring.

-- Jill Davies, BCS Project Director & Bonnie Fowler, NRCDV Director

ECONOMIC ADVOCACY CAPACITY BUILDING: IOWA'S EXPERIENCE AND LESSONS LEARNED

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In 1997, the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) began a long-term and concentrated effort to respond to battered women's economic security needs. Iowa advocates knew that housing, in particular, was a critical safety option for battered women.

ICADV's initial step involved **identifying and recognizing battered women's economic needs** by surveying member programs. The survey helped to raise awareness of economic issues confronting battered women and strengthened ICADV's resolve.

ICADV's next step was to **develop leadership and staff commitment to economic issues** through the formation of a state-wide task force. Key membership included the executive director of a local domestic violence program with previous housing experience, two battered women's advocates, and BCS staff. ICADV staff supported activities of the task force, which included a special issue of *Empower*, ICADV's newsletter, and a state-wide training

The next "stage" of Iowa's effort involved building the capacity of advocates **to provide individual financial advocacy and to collaborate with the community on larger economic issues**. With support of BCS and funding from the Iowa Women's Foundation and the Ms. Foundation for Women, ICADV supported and BCS staff provided intensive training and follow-up to three domestic violence programs over two years. The training included the Personal Economic Planning (PEP) curriculum developed by Elizabeth Stone House staff in Boston and the BCS Curricula on policy advocacy, outreach to underserved communities, and collaboration skills. As a result of the capacity building efforts, the local programs began to offer PEP classes and led community-wide economic summits to develop plans for increasing economic options for battered women.

In 2001, ICADV **institutionalized its commitment to economic advocacy** by creating a Housing and Economic Justice

Coordinator staff position. The Coordinator's responsibilities include providing quarterly regional and biannual state-wide advocate trainings on an array of economic topics.

The impact of the position has been extensive. The Coordinator helped the state-wide task force increase its membership and scope and also worked with the task force to develop a long-range plan for ICADV. In 2003, ICADV's economic advocacy intersected with its community organizing efforts with battered immigrant women to create culturally specific programming to Spanish-speaking and Bosnian speaking women.

Also, ICADV raised additional financial resources by partnering with the Iowa Coalition for Housing and the Homeless on a grant to the Iowa Finance Authority. This newly funded project provides critical capacity building assistance to domestic violence programs regarding the long-term housing needs of homeless battered women.

Asked to reflect on the Iowa experience, Amy Correia, ICADV's Housing and Economic Justice Coordinator, believes that the specific focus on economic needs has helped battered women tremendously.

LESSONS LEARNED:

1. Provide advocates with practical and useful information and training.

Housing is a large and unfamiliar system for many advocates. As Iowa's experience with

housing issues evolved, both coalition and local program staff began to see what housing advocacy would involve and how it might benefit battered women. For example, Amy learned that advocates needed to know about tenant/landlord law and then made that information available statewide. Advocates soon began contacting her for help with thinking through strategies and options for women threatened with eviction. This individual work led ICADV to collaborate with the Iowa Coalition on Housing and the Homeless on a statewide policy initiative to ensure tenants are notified of their legal rights and domestic violence protections.

2. Commit coalition staff resources to support local program advocacy.

There is no doubt that Iowa's economic advocacy work has benefited greatly from the dedication of staff time at the state coalition level. The Housing and Economic Justice Coordinator directly supports the state-wide Housing and Economic Advocacy Task Force, provides guidance on funding resources and grant applications, assists with PEP group development at local programs, and community-wide anti-poverty initiatives. These functions, combined with dedicated regional advocate trainings, have increased ICADV member program capacity to meet the economic security needs of battered women in Iowa.

--Andrea Farney, NRCDV Policy Analyst

The following BCS papers provide additional information and background on housing and building economic advocacy capacity:

Publication #2: Innovative Strategies to provide Housing for Battered Women

Publication #3: Housing and Battered Women: A Case Study of Domestic Violence Programs in Iowa

Publication #16: How are Domestic Violence Programs Meeting the Economic Needs of Battered Women in Iowa? An Assessment and Recommendations

Publication #17: Integrating Anti-Poverty Work into Domestic Violence Advocacy: Iowa's Experience

These papers are available on the Internet at www.vawnet.org and also by calling the NRCDV at 800-537-2238

Building Comprehensive Solutions to Domestic Violence is an ongoing initiative to help domestic violence organizations collaborate more effectively in their communities and build visions, policies, and practices that respond to the current realities facing battered women and their families, especially those living in poverty. The BCS Newsletter serves as a forum for sharing economic advocacy-related projects involving domestic violence programs. Let us know what you think of this newsletter. We want to hear from you. Send an email to acf@pcadv.org or call 1-800-537-2238 and ask for Andrea Farney, BCS Newsletter Editor.