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**How Are Domestic Violence Programs Meeting the
Economic Needs of Battered Women in Iowa?
An Assessment and Recommendations**

Katie M. Ciorba VonDeLinde

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About the Author

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Introduction

Imagine a woman with two young children, health insurance from her partner's employer, a minimum wage job, and no car of her own. If she leaves her abusive partner, she may lose housing, transportation, and health insurance. She will be forced to try to shelter, clothe, and feed her family of three on \$5.25 per hour and pay childcare costs in order to keep her job. Given these difficult choices, it is clear why some women choose to stay in abusive relationships (Davies, Lyon & Monti-Catania, 1998).

Research indicates that poverty is a significant problem for many battered women. Findings show that over half of the women receiving welfare have experienced physical violence at some point in their adult lives (Lyon, 2000). In addition, there is some evidence that a woman's abusive partner often interferes with her ability to work and to receive job training (Lyon, 2000).

Although it is clear that poverty is a major issue in the lives of battered women, there is little information about what domestic violence advocates are doing to assist women with their financial needs. Do advocates explain welfare benefits to battered women? Are advocates aware of job training programs? What do advocates do for women without cars who need to get to and from work in areas with little or no public transportation? This paper will explore the answers to some of these questions using the results of focus groups with abused women and staff of domestic violence programs.

Approach

In an effort to understand the economic needs of battered women in Iowa and to explore how domestic violence advocates meet these needs, the author conducted nine focus groups around the state: five with domestic violence advocates and four with battered women. More than 30 battered women and over 40 domestic violence advocates from rural towns and larger cities participated. This report describes the economic needs identified by the focus groups, summarizes the general themes of the groups, and makes recommendations about ways that advocates in local domestic violence programs and state coalitions can improve economic advocacy.

Focus Groups with Battered Women

Five domestic violence programs organized focus groups of current and former clients. During the focus groups, women were first asked to list their financial needs and concerns. Women were then asked questions about the economic services that they received, how they learned about those services, and how domestic violence programs could improve their response to women's financial problems (see Appendix A for a list of questions).

Focus Groups with Domestic Violence Advocates

The advocate focus groups, composed of staff from domestic violence programs, were conducted differently from the focus groups with battered women. First, domestic violence advocates were asked to identify battered women's economic needs and the financial services available to them

in their area. Advocates also participated in economic advocacy role-plays. For example, advocates were presented a case in which a woman quit her job when she moved to a shelter because she didn't have a car to drive to work. She was considering applying for TANF. Advocates were asked to join the role-play by asking her questions about her current situation in order to provide economic advocacy to her (for a complete list of the role-plays and group questions, see Appendix B). Finally, advocates were asked general questions about the process of providing economic advocacy such as, "What are the rewards of talking with women about their economic needs and goals?"

Identified Economic Needs

Focus groups with battered women

Battered and formerly battered women readily identified their economic needs and concerns. Despite the fact that the groups were composed of women from different communities and backgrounds, many of the worries they expressed were repeated in each group. Below is a summary of the various economic concerns identified at multiple focus group sites.

Health care. Women in the focus groups were worried about the cost of prescription drugs, the lack of medical insurance offered by employers -- even for full time positions, the loss of their partner's insurance benefits if they left their relationship, and making too much money to qualify for Medicaid but not enough to pay for private medical insurance. Health care was frequently the first economic burden identified by women in the focus groups and a major problem for many participants. For example, one woman felt forced to end her career as a hairstylist after leaving her abusive partner because she needed to find a job that provided health insurance for herself and her daughter.

Childcare. Women were concerned about the high cost of childcare and discussed the need for affordable, quality childcare during second and third shifts, and for children who are ill or who have disabilities. "Half of my pay check goes to childcare, but if I don't work, I get in trouble with welfare. What am I supposed to do?" asked one participant.

Impact of Batterer. When battered women were asked how their partner or ex-partner influenced their economic plans, every woman had a story to share. Women talked about being forbidden to work, about their partners' sabotage of work by late night abuse, their partners' hourly harassing phone calls to them at work, destruction of their transportation, and jointly-earned money that was hidden from them. One woman talked about the unique issues that she faced from her self-employed partner. She said, "When my husband was angry with me for trying to leave, he would refuse to work. Since he was self-employed and we needed the money, I would have to appease him to get money and food for my children." Another woman said, "I was in that relationship for twenty years, and never allowed to work a day of it. How am I supposed to get a job to support my family with no skills, no experience, and no references?"

Living Wage Jobs. The paucity of livable wage jobs was at the root of many of the women's economic problems. Women discussed the dilemma of working full time, making too much money to qualify for benefits such as TANF or Medicaid, and being unable to afford private

health care, childcare, transportation, or rent. Many women identified themselves as “working poor.” One woman said, “I barely make enough money to make ends meet, but I make too much money to get any help. If I have any kind of crisis, I’m in trouble.” Another woman said, “Everyone tells you to go out and get a job, but then what are you supposed to do? There just aren’t many jobs out there that will pay enough for me and my kids to make it.”

Child support. Child support problems generally revolved around issues of child support recovery by the Department of Human Services (DHS). Women receiving TANF funds were frustrated that recovered child support money went directly to DHS. “Even five dollars a month of child support from him would help me feed and clothe my kids,” said one struggling mother. Another problem was the onus placed on the women to provide information to child support enforcement officers about the current residence and employer of their ex-partner. Women felt that this responsibility should be the enforcement workers’ rather than their own. The final problem identified was the difficulty of receiving child support from men who are entrepreneurs. Women said that men who own their own businesses often underreport their income, thereby decreasing the likelihood that they will be held accountable for the full amount of support owed.

Housing and Rental Deposits. Women described the problems of long waiting lists for public housing and Section 8 vouchers, and the refusal of landlords to accept Section 8 vouchers. In addition, women said that some landlords expect a deposit up front, which includes the first and last months’ rent, a burden too difficult for many women leaving domestic violence relationships. One woman spoke for many others when she said, “With the long waiting lists and no apartments available, I’m afraid that I’m going to get kicked out of the shelter because of the time limits [on shelter stays]. Then, I won’t have anywhere to go with my kids.”

Utilities and utility deposits. Women are frustrated with expensive utility deposits and bills. This was especially a concern for women with past-due utility bills. Because some of the women were not allowed access to family financial records, they were unaware that there were unpaid utility bills in their names until after they left their relationship. Unless the women pay off their utility bills and advance the required utility deposits, they cannot “hook up” utilities in their names at another residence. For some women, this can mean waiting to rent a housing unit until they can pay back bills of hundreds of dollars.

Transportation. Women discussed concerns about transportation, with their primary barrier being either not owning or having access to a vehicle. For many, public transportation was either entirely unavailable in their community or inaccessible due to limited routes and high fares. One woman who worked in a city ten miles away from the shelter resorted to paying other shelter residents to drive her to and from work.

Other financial difficulties voiced by the women in one or two of the groups included: costs of clothing for children; lack of work experience, job skills, job training, and education; no money for therapy for themselves or their children; lack of food; lack of diapers; high legal fees for obtaining a divorce; the lack of welfare benefits for women without children; and fear that the batterer would hurt them at work.

Focus groups with domestic violence advocates

When advocates were asked about the economic issues they view as having a significant impact on the lives of battered women, they mentioned issues similar to those raised by the abused women. All of the advocate groups identified transportation, medical costs, high legal fees, lack of affordable housing, and childcare as pressing economic concerns for battered women.

The largest discrepancy between battered women and advocates, however, occurred around legal issues. While every advocate group identified legal fees as an economic need, only two battered women's groups listed them as a concern. This discrepancy may be the result of the intense focus the battered women's movement has placed on advocacy within the legal system. It also may be that battered women were concerned about immediate needs that affect their ability to pay rent and feed their children. Many of the women's concerns, such as child support and custody, may in fact be legal issues, but the women did not identify the need for legal fees as one of the most pressing economic problems.

The advocate groups identified utility deposits, clothing, job training, education, therapy costs, food, child support, livable wages jobs, issues for undocumented women, relocation costs, debt and poor credit, safety costs (such as alarm systems, locks, reinforced doors), and strict eligibility requirements for economic assistance programs as other concerns. Advocates proved to be very aware of the multiple economic problems facing women in abusive relationships.

Identified Barriers to Economic Advocacy

In the focus group discussions, it was obvious that economic needs profoundly impact the lives of battered women and the decisions that they make. The groups repeatedly mentioned that economic roadblocks prevent battered women from living healthy and productive lives.

Advocates readily acknowledged economic needs of battered women yet seemed uncertain about how and when to help women with economic issues. For example, advocates were concerned that economic advocacy may be a long-term service that they, as short-term crisis centered agencies, were not equipped to provide. They also had questions about whether it was more empowering for women to undertake economic advocacy on their own behalf. The advocates' questions and uncertainties indicate that they are unclear about their role in providing economic advocacy. For example, while advocates agree that economic issues are important, the programs interviewed offer no systematic economic training to paid staff or volunteers.

The following summarizes the themes of the focus groups including inconsistent knowledge and service provision, lack of training, confusion about where economic advocacy fits into the mission and philosophy of domestic violence programs, and system barriers. Finally, recommendations are made as to how domestic violence programs can improve their economic advocacy services.

1. Inconsistent Knowledge and Service Provision Among Advocates

Domestic violence advocates are expected to know a lot of information. Not only must they be proficient in the dynamics of domestic violence and counseling techniques, they also need to be informed about how the criminal justice system works and knowledgeable about the legal remedies available to victims of domestic violence. Battered women's advocates also are increasingly assisting women who face multiple problems of battering, poverty, substance abuse, mental health challenges, and physical disabilities. Managing these interconnected issues requires advocates who are knowledgeable about government benefit programs, social services, and community resources. Information from the focus groups demonstrated that some advocates are well informed about economic services and regularly share financial resource information. However, information about economic services is not regularly distributed to staff or shared with women seeking assistance.

During the economic advocacy role-plays, domestic violence advocates demonstrated that they do know what questions to ask when assessing a family's economic circumstances. However, when the role-play facilitator asked them to offer specific information about eligibility requirements, public benefits, and community services, many advocates floundered. Advocates know how to *determine* that a woman is poor, but do not know how to *respond* if a woman has little or no money. For example, when asked how she would respond to women's questions about FIP, Iowa's TANF program, one domestic violence advocate said, "I would refer [the battered woman] to her FIP worker if she had any questions because I don't know enough about it." Another advocate said, "A lot of times clients know more about the [FIP] program and what's available than I do."

The battered women clearly noted that the amount of economic information and services domestic violence advocates provide varies greatly. For example, one woman said, "Some of the [advocates] are very aware of the [economic] programs but others don't know anything. The people that do know things are busy all the time but they are helpful if you can get them at a convenient time." A woman at another focus group said, "Some advocates are great and others don't have much information and don't want to spend much time with you. They have a book of resources, but it stays in the office and nothing is given to us, so if your advocate isn't available, you can't get help." Another woman responded to the question, "Did advocates talk with you about your economic needs" by saying, "The [advocates] go through a checklist of your needs at intake and the counselor is supposed to follow through on that. Some advocates do but some don't. You hope that you'll get one who follows through."

In addition, the battered women in the focus groups indicated that those domestic violence advocates who are knowledgeable about resources and readily available to provide economic services, such as helping to create long-term financial goals, greatly improve women's economic opportunities and self-confidence. Therefore, improving the advocate's economic advocacy skills would directly benefit battered women.

2. Piecemeal Training About Economic Issues

In the state of Iowa, domestic violence advocates are legally required to obtain twenty hours of training in specified topics in order to have privileged confidential interactions with clients.

However, most domestic violence programs require much more rigorous training for their staff members and volunteers. Training about counseling skills, diversity, and legal issues are standard in domestic violence programs, but these programs fail to offer systematic training for staff or volunteers on available economic services and advocacy approaches. In fact, none of the five programs visited require or provide systematic training for staff or volunteers.

All of these programs offer in-service education on economic programs available in their communities, but this training provides piecemeal information to only those staff members who are able to attend. In some of the programs, volunteers who provide direct services are not invited to staff meetings and therefore do not have any opportunity to learn about economic advocacy.

When asked about the lack of training, one advocate responded, “Most of us knew some things when we started but if we don’t know something, we ask each other for input.” Battered women in the focus group were asked where they learned about the economic resources they have utilized. In only one of the four focus groups did women say that they learned about economic programs from domestic violence advocates. The other women learned about resources by doing research on their own, by asking other women in shelters or support groups, or from community services.

When asked a specific question about the Family Investment Agreement, a document every woman receiving TANF benefits must complete, domestic violence advocates did not know how to respond. One domestic violence advocate said, “We need more training on that. It’s an ongoing training issue.” Overall, their responses suggest that such training would be more effective if it were required for all staff members and volunteers. This consistent training and dissemination of information could help to increase knowledge and decrease variability in the service provided. In this way, advocates would be better prepared to serve low-income battered women.

3. Lack of Clarity About Providing Economic Advocacy Within the Mission of Domestic Violence Programs

Domestic violence programs in Iowa have a firm background in feminist empowerment philosophy. *Empowerment* is a term frequently used to describe the goal of shelter services, which is to *empower* battered women. It is also used to describe how services are provided, in an *empowering* way. The focus group discussions brought up issues of how empowerment is defined and how that definition guides the advocate's work. Staff also identified a perceived conflict between work as crisis interventionists and economic advocates.

The issue of how economic advocacy fits into the goal of empowerment raises the larger question of how domestic violence programs define empowering services. Advocates in the focus groups were inclined to define empowering advocacy as providing women with referrals and encouraging them to follow up on their own. One domestic violence agency director said, “...it goes back to how we are trained and what we do, because there is a fine line between making a call for a person because you feel they don’t have the skills to do it and asking the

person to do it. If we are asking advocates to make the phone call, that would be a change from traditional advocacy where you are assisting the client in that rather than calling the places.”

In the article, “A model for empowerment practice,” the initial stage of empowerment practice includes: linking individuals and families to existing services, beginning the consciousness-raising process, and teaching clients how to find and request resources (Parsons et al., 1998). The idea of linking clients to services goes a step beyond simply referring them. When linking clients, advocates may attend an initial meeting with a TANF worker, give a client a catalogue from a local community college, or contact a colleague to clarify eligibility requirements. Part of the linking process is teaching clients the necessary skills to carry out these things on their own in the future. According to this model, after the client has met her immediate basic needs, such as housing, food, and safety, additional work is done to increase the client’s power. Some domestic violence advocates have equated providing shelter with meeting the client’s basic needs. However, this is a temporary solution that does not fully address their lack of housing, employment, or resources.

When exploring the concept of empowering economic services, it is helpful to listen to the experiences of battered women. In the focus groups, one woman said, “You have to ask the advocates to get information, but sometimes you don’t know where to start or what questions to ask. The advocates help you if you go to them, but you need to make the effort.”

The battered women expressed frustration with outside economic systems and acknowledged that they needed help from domestic violence advocates. Some shared that their income maintenance workers did not respect them and told them to go back to their husbands. One battered woman staying at a shelter was frustrated by her interactions with her TANF income maintenance worker. “She is dragging her feet and not being straight with me,” she explained. When asked if she believed it would help to have an advocate call the TANF worker or attend a meeting with her she responded, “Yes. That would make all the difference in the world.”

The differences between advocate-defined empowerment and what battered women say they need to become economically secure are important. Perhaps some battered women need help maneuvering around systems that domestic violence advocates in this study themselves said were, “confusing, constantly changing, and unclear in their eligibility requirements.” One challenge of working with low-income women on economic issues may be to redefine what advocates consider to be empowering services.

Another important issue raised by domestic violence advocates was the conflict between providing crisis, short-term services and meeting long-term economic needs. Shelters and domestic violence programs have traditionally provided short-term crisis intervention for women experiencing domestic violence. However, advocates in the focus groups view economic advocacy as long-term services. One advocate said, “Traditionally, battered women shelters have been crisis, short term. Therefore, philosophy, funding, and what we are trained to do is short-term assistance...if [battered women] want to work on long-term goals they are referred to therapy or financial counseling.” Another advocate said, “It’s hard to look at long-term issues when there are so many immediate needs. How does [a woman] do long-term economic planning when she can hardly get up in the morning? You may need to work on self-esteem

before working on their [economic] goals.” An agency director acknowledged that working on economic issues requires a “shift” in service provision. She said, “Our focus has been mostly on safety and counseling but is now shifting to focus on economics, and the time to make the shift just isn’t there.”

The concerns of the domestic violence advocates are legitimate: how do they provide economic advocacy in the short time they are working with women? How do they redefine safety to include economic security? Domestic violence advocates also acknowledge that battered women are staying longer in shelters because of multiple issues, many stemming from economic roadblocks. Advocates may find that economic advocacy helps women establish more rapidly their own residences and acquire other basic resources.

Women’s needs for economic advocacy may require some programs to revise current views of empowerment and reconsider the exclusive focus on short-term crisis intervention.

4. System Barriers and the Lack of Funding

Both battered women and domestic violence advocates in the focus groups identified that system barriers, such as eligibility requirements for benefits and lack of funding for economic advocacy, have an impact on the women's well being and the advocates' service provision.

When asked what limits or restricts their ability to provide economic help, advocates replied, “our funding.” One director expressed concern that taking on economic issues was another burden for an overworked, underpaid staff. She said, “As the paradigm shifts, we will devote more to economics, which will take a whole shift in the way we think, the way we operate and the resources we need to be able to provide [economic advocacy] to battered women and their children. We are working on a skeleton crew with limited resources. Economic advocacy will be one additional task that we will need to do.”

Domestic violence advocates are not alone in identifying the need for funding for economic advocacy. The National Advisory Council on Domestic Violence’s Agenda to End Violence against Women recommends, “provid[ing] funding and technical assistance to states and local communities to increase the economic options of women survivors of violence.”¹

In addition to funding shortages within domestic violence programs, advocates and battered women highlighted the problems of working collaboratively with local social service agencies and a general lack of resources for low-income women. One advocate said, “Women have to jump through so many hoops and try to piece money together from this place and that, and money from churches and civic groups runs out early in the year.” Another advocate said, “There are not enough resources for women to leave and make it independently.”

Battered women shared their stories of mistreatment by social service agencies. A woman said, “They treat me like shit and don’t believe a word I say. They think I’m lying.” Advocates also had negative experiences with agencies providing economic services. “Some service providers just don’t care—they just go through the motions,” explained one advocate. Another advocate

¹ For more information, see www.ojp.usdoj.gov:80/vawo/agendaforthenation/

said, “I don’t understand how their eligibility works. One day, a woman calls about services and the next day another woman asking about the same services gets a completely different response.” Lack of funding in domestic violence programs for economic advocacy and the multiple barriers of other systems are overwhelming to advocates and affect the services that they provide.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on information gathered from the focus groups and have the goal of helping advocates meet the economic and safety needs of battered women.

For Community Based Domestic Violence Programs

1. Prioritize economic advocacy.

Battered women and domestic violence advocates identified economic issues as a major concern. Both groups also identified discrepancies between what battered women said they needed and what programs were able to provide. Prioritizing economic advocacy will move programs to integrate financial issues into their vision of empowering advocacy, develop new and better ways to train staff, create systemic change that improves the economic conditions battered women face, and ultimately provide battered women with more options for safety and security.

Prioritization may also mean that all agency advocacy personnel must be involved in providing economic advocacy. Domestic violence programs have often responded to newly identified “needs” by designating a specific staff member to work on those issues, such as a legal advocate or child advocate. Economic issues were identified as being so central to the safety and other concerns of the women in the focus groups that all advocacy staff need to become proficient in economic advocacy skills and knowledge. Systems advocacy staff will also need to analyze and address the economic impact of policies, programs, and community efforts to respond to domestic violence.

2. Integrate battered women’s perspectives into program development.

The battered women participating in the focus groups clearly defined their economic needs and the strengths and weaknesses of economic advocacy currently provided by domestic violence programs. If programs regularly seek information from battered women about their needs and how programs could best meet them, they will be in a better position to create economic advocacy techniques that are effective and empowering.

3. Increase collaboration with community agencies providing economic advocacy to low-income women.

Collaboration can help domestic violence advocates create allies in other agencies, remain up-to-date on economic resources and available social services, increase opportunities for community change, and strengthen advocacy for the individual battered woman. One program involved in the focus groups identified collaboration as an important element of its economic advocacy

because collaborating provided the staff with trusted contacts in other agencies and a thorough knowledge of community resources. The battered women who were clients of this program reported the most positive experiences with advocates in terms of economic issues.

4. Train advocates on economic issues and advocacy.

For advocates to meet the economic and safety needs of battered women, they must all receive regular training on economic advocacy, community resources, and economic issues such as employment, childcare, housing, health care, and government benefits programs. The training should be provided to staff and volunteers and include information about local community resources and economic issues. The information advocates need about economic issues changes constantly and the role of economic advocacy is evolving, therefore in-service education and training opportunities should be offered regularly to all staff and volunteers to ensure the information they are providing battered women is accurate and useful.

For Domestic Violence Coalitions

1. Include battered women's economic needs in policy analysis and systemic advocacy.

The battered women in the focus groups identified that advocacy alone would not help them gain economic independence. For battered women to be safe and economically secure, systems change is necessary. Systemic advocacy must regularly assess how policies and programs are affecting battered women's economic opportunities and what responses must be in place to meet the unique risks and barriers to their economic security. Advocates will need to integrate information from battered women to ensure their analysis and advocacy are accurate and effective.

- **Provide domestic violence programs with training and advocacy tools that will help them prepare advocates to respond to economic issues.**

Coalitions may be in the best position to support local training efforts. Coalitions might do any of the following to help ensure their programs are prepared to provide economic advocacy.

- **Create comprehensive economic advocacy training manuals.**

Coalitions could produce an economic advocacy training manual for statewide distribution to all advocates including information on the role of economic advocacy, how to identify economic issues, linking women to resources and information, and basic information about programs such as TANF, HUD housing programs, Welfare to Work, Community Action Programs, Medicaid/Medicare, SSI/SSD, and Child Health Insurance Program (CHIP). For example, in 1999 the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV) developed Domestic Violence and Welfare Benefits: A Manual for Advocates.

Upon completion of the training manual, state coalitions could provide regional "train-the-trainer" workshops to prepare directors and other program educators to disseminate the information from the manual.

- **Provide regional economic advocacy training to local domestic violence agencies.**
- **Include economic advocacy training in advocate certification requirements.**

In some states, domestic violence advocates are required to obtain a specified number of hours in certain topics in order to be “certified.” This certification requirement could be amended to include economic advocacy training.

- **Develop economic advocacy tools for domestic violence advocates.**

In addition to training materials, economic advocacy tools should be created or adapted to meet the needs of the domestic violence programs. These could include intake questions to identify economic needs and basic information to guide advocacy.

2. Work with domestic violence programs and other coalitions to secure funding for economic advocacy.

Domestic violence advocates reported that the lack funding is a major barrier to providing economic services. To alleviate this need, programs should actively search for additional funding in tandem with the state coalition and apply for additional financial resources.

Conclusion

The focus groups increased understanding of the needs of battered women, the current knowledge and responses of domestic violence advocates, and improvements that could be made in programs to better meet the needs of low-income battered women in Iowa. While there is much work to do, advocates in the focus groups already acknowledged the rewards of economic advocacy. When asked about these rewards, an advocate replied, “I enjoy watching women blossom as they get their first jobs.” Another advocate said she enjoyed, “Seeing women increase their personal power; [we] are the first person to talk with women about what they want.” A third advocate said, “I like the increased confidence you see in the women. It gives the women a chance to talk about their goals and their dreams—you are the only person who will do it.”

Domestic violence advocates already understand that economic issues are important, and many have experienced the positive benefits of providing economic advocacy. The challenge is to move this understanding toward creating changes in domestic violence programs to better serve the needs of low-income battered women.

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Appendix A

Economic discussion questions for battered women

1. What needs do you have around money in order to care for yourself and your family? What worries you most about your money needs?
2. What, if any, help have you received for your needs around money? Where have you received that help? How did you learn about that help?
3. What help has been unavailable?
4. Did advocates at the domestic violence program talk with you about your economic needs, such as financial concerns, employment, job training, childcare or transportation? If so, what did you discuss? Did they help you? If so, how?
5. What information did advocates provide about available economic or housing services (for example, TANF, food stamps, Medicaid)?
6. What information about economic or housing services did you not receive that you wish you had?
7. Do you feel that the advocates were knowledgeable about economic and housing programs or services in the community? Why or why not?
8. Were the advocates aware of your economic goals, such as your “dream job,” whether you wanted to work part or full time or stay home with your children, job training you wanted to receive, or the amount of money you wanted to earn? If so, how did advocates learn about your economic goals?
9. Were advocates respectful of your economic goals? How could advocates show respect for women’s economic goals?
10. How were/are your economic plans influenced by your partner (or ex-partner)? Did you share that information with anyone? Who? If so, how did that person respond? If not, why didn’t you share that information?
11. How could the domestic violence program improve assistance or advocacy in terms of economic and housing issues?
12. If you are participating in TANF or if you were interested in applying for assistance when you were working with the domestic violence program, did an advocate ask the length of time you used TANF in the past? Did you discuss TANF time limits? What did the advocate discuss with you about the Family Violence option? Did an advocate talk with you about your TANF contract (FIA)?

Appendix B

Advocates Focus Group

Let's begin our discussion by defining economic issues. When I say economic issues, I mean issues that impact a woman's ability to meet financial needs of her family, however she chooses to define family. Given this definition, many kinds of needs and services are a part of economic issues for battered women. Let's begin by brainstorming a list of economic needs facing battered women in your area. [Write down ideas on newsprint and post]

Now, let's brainstorm a list of economic services available in your area. [Write down ideas on newsprint and post]

If you think of other needs or services during our conversation, please add the economic issues or programs to the list.

Next, we will participate in a small group role-play and then go on to some questions. If at any time the questions or directions are unclear or confusing, please ask me for clarification. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. For the first portion of this discussion group, I am asking you to participate in a small role-play. In this role-play, you will be the advocates and I will be a woman seeking services in your program. We are meeting for the third time. In earlier sessions, my immediate safety needs were addressed. Please remember that there are no right and wrong answers in this role-play. All of the information you have to share is helpful to learn more about your work. [Post role-play directions on overhead or on poster board revealing one situation at a time].

- a. Please ask me questions that you feel are important to know about my financial situation, economic needs, and economic plans, long and short term, in order for you to provide advocacy to me.
- b. Please ask me questions that you feel are important to know about other aspects of my life, such as my safety and support system, in order to help me with my *economic situation*.

Role Play #1

I am a woman staying at the domestic violence shelter. I was working full time before I came to shelter, but I quit when I moved into shelter because of transportation issues. I am now considering applying for TANF.

- a. What questions would you ask me about my current situation?
- b. What other information would you ask about TANF? [Time limits; prompt with FVO if necessary] What information would you ask about my FIA?
- c. What information would you share with me?
- d. How would you talk with me about my short term goals? Long term goals? What plans would you help make? What information will you share with me about long term planning?

- e. After you have given me applicable service information, what would be the next step in advocacy? [prompt if necessary-would you refer me to agencies? Would you go with me to apply for services/look for employment? Why or why not?]
- f. How will you document the information from our conversation? How will that documentation be used?

Role Play #2

Imagine that I am receiving TANF. I have contacted several childcare providers and none will take my toddler who has developmental disabilities. I was offered a job that I was interested in, but I turned it down because I do not have childcare. I am worried that my worker will not believe me and I have to meet with her tomorrow. How could you help me?

Role Play #3

I am a woman receiving outreach services. We are meeting to discuss safety planning. I am living with my partner who works in construction. He works sporadically, depending on availability of work in our area. We have a three-year old daughter and a five-year old son. I am five months pregnant and I am worried that we will not make ends meet when I have the third child. I have a part-time job currently, but I am interested in looking for full-time work. Neither my partner nor I have health insurance. I am afraid that my partner will be angry if I approach the subject with him.

- a. How will you talk with me about my situation?
- b. What further information do you need about my situation? What questions would you ask me? What options do I have?

Thank you for participating in the role plays. Does anyone have any questions or comments about role plays?

The final portion of the discussion group will be a discussion about working with battered women on economic issues. If the questions are confusing, please ask me to clarify.

1. What is rewarding about talking with women about their economic needs and goals, such as: monetary assistance they may need; the type of work they would like to do; education or training they need or are interested in; transportation needs?
2. On the other hand, what is challenging about talking with women about their economic needs and plans (prompt with list above if needed)?
3. What restricts or limits your ability to assist women with their economic needs?
4. Do you talk to women about the economic services, such as TANF, job training, SSI [or others listed on the economic services sheet], they have used before? Do you talk about their experiences with those services? If so, how is that information used? Do you share that information with other domestic violence programs? The state coalition? Other agencies?

5. There are many different economic and housing programs-federal, state, and local, public and private. Many of these programs are quite complex and can be confusing. What economic or housing services/programs or community groups, such as TANF, Promise Jobs, SSI, social security, Medicaid, CHIP, Section 8 or others, do you not understand or have questions about? It may be helpful to look at our list of economic services [If necessary, go down list of services created by group and look at questions for each]? What are some of your questions?
6. Do you have a regular contact person(s) at the economic service agencies listed [such as TANF, Public Housing Authority (if relevant), Promise jobs, or other agencies that assist women with economic issues]? Why or why not? If so, is that helpful? Which agencies do you feel comfortable calling to discuss an issue? Why or why not?
7. What kind of training did you receive on housing programs [go through each separately – again, it may be helpful to go down the list of services, adding any that they did not mention], TANF, food stamps, disability, child care assistance, job training programs, Medicaid, Promise jobs, CHIP? How and when? How long does the training last? What information do you wish you would have received during training?
8. What, if any, challenges have you seen in the lives of women as a result of the changes in TANF?