

COLLABORATION A KEY FACTOR IN FOSTERING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

This issue highlights how state domestic violence coalitions and community-based organizations are building collaborations to create economic opportunity for battered women.

Developing and maintaining collaborative relationships can be difficult. Advocates tell us that a successful collaboration has some of the following characteristics*:

- A clear purpose is developed.
- Agreed upon outcomes are established; workplans and priorities are defined and carried out.
- An effective decision making process exists.
- Effective communication takes place; methods to resolve conflicts and to negotiate are developed and used.
- Power is shared and the workload is distributed equitably.
- Information sharing occurs.
- Mutual respect develops.
- The collaboration gets results: meets the needs of battered women and their children and reduces or eliminates domestic violence.

*Excerpted from the Building Comprehensive Solutions to Domestic Violence Training Curricula, with modules in policy advocacy, outreach to underserved communities, and skills for successful collaboration. Order copies from the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, 800-537-2238.

Consortium Develops an Economic Action Program - R.E.A.P.

A new project is underway in St. Louis, Missouri to support battered women's efforts to achieve economic stability. Redevelopment Opportunities for Women, Inc. (ROW), a not-for-profit organization, is leading a consortium of 12 local domestic violence programs and 4 homeless shelters to implement REAP (ROW's Economic Action Program). REAP includes three specific initiatives: an economic action group curriculum, Women's Savings Accounts (similar to Individual Development Accounts), and micro-lending services.

REAP was developed with the guidance and support of local domestic violence agencies within the consortium and the St. Louis Regional Missouri Coalition Against Domestic Violence Economic Development Task Force. REAP's components will be phased-in over the next 6 months. Funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development homeless services grant program and the National Endowment for Financial Education is supporting implementation of the economic action group curriculum.

The economic action group curriculum includes core safety information and also focuses on three dimensions of economic empowerment: 1) financial education and literacy;

2) resource information and acquisition; and 3) skill development. The ROW Financial Advocate is introducing the complete 12-hour curriculum to staff of the participating programs in March and will begin offering groups to women at two project sites in April.

The Women's Savings Accounts and micro-lending services components are still in development, with plans to begin operation by September, 2001. Women participating in REAP will have access to micro-lending services for short-term loans to assist them with self-defined goals (e.g., security deposits for permanent housing). Women's Savings Accounts will allow women to develop economic assets through a system of matched savings. ROW will be the coordinating entity that will provide credit counseling, loan applications, IDA account management, individual advocacy and follow-up services.

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Collaboration with State Welfare Departments Creates Options for Battered Women

When the U.S. Congress passed federal welfare reform legislation in 1996, it included a provision that gives states the opportunity to adopt a "Family Violence Option" and to create state-specific policies and procedures for providing welfare services for victims of domestic violence. Many state domestic violence coalitions have successfully advocated for the inclusion of domestic violence policies into their state's welfare program. A number of states have gone a step further and advocated with legislators and welfare departments to earmark federal welfare funds for comprehensive domestic violence services in local county welfare offices.

Pennsylvania

After the Pennsylvania legislature adopted the Family Violence Option as part of its welfare plan in 1997, the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW) formed a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary task force to develop policy and procedures. Staff of the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence and community-based shelter programs were appointed to the task force. State TANF funds were secured to ensure appropriate implementation of these domestic violence policies, and PCADV hired a TANF Coordinator, Carolyn Stevens. Carolyn was a member of the Task Force and characterized its work in the following way, "The Task Force moved from a bureaucratic assignment into a working team that was focused on the needs of victims receiving public assistance."

Accomplishments of the task force include the development of a training curriculum for DPW staff, a handbook on domestic violence policies within DPW, a resource guide on welfare benefits for domestic violence programs, and training for all caseworkers and clerical staff in the welfare offices (over 9000 staff were trained).

During the initial training of DPW staff, a domestic violence program liaison from county welfare offices was identified to work with the local domestic violence program. Additionally, the state funds 17 part-time welfare advocates in domestic violence programs. Carolyn Stevens provides advocates across the state with resource materials, quarterly trainings, and technical assistance on particular cases.

The welfare advocates offer information and assistance to battered women applying for the family violence option, and provide advocacy about other issues that arise with county welfare departments. For more information about Pennsylvania's project, call Carolyn Stevens at 717-545-6400.

Alabama

Last year, the Alabama Coalition Against Domestic Violence entered into a contract with the Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR) to provide an in-house domestic violence specialist in each county DHR office in the state. Allowing for a 2-year phase-in of the program, it is expected that by the end of 2001 every county DHR office will contract with a local domestic violence program to employ a specialist to work in the welfare office.

These on-site specialists will be responsible for 1) training DHR staff on domestic violence and its impact on welfare utilization, child welfare, and adult abuse; 2) working with welfare recipients who identify domestic violence as a barrier to economic self-sufficiency on safety planning, service referrals, crisis counseling, and advocacy; 3) consulting with DHR case managers in the development of appropriate case plans for victims of domestic violence; and 4) coordinating client and community services offered by DHR, local domestic violence programs, and other community agencies.

All applicants for financial assistance, either through the TANF grant or the state's welfare-to-work program will be screened for domestic violence. Those identified as affected by domestic violence will be referred to the specialist. The specialist will conduct a risk assessment and assist with safety planning. All services offered by the domestic violence specialist are voluntary.

The Alabama Coalition employs a full-time project coordinator and four consultants to work with the state about on-going evaluation of its domestic violence welfare policies, as well as to oversee and support the work of the local domestic violence specialists. For more information about Alabama's program, call Carol Gundlach at 334-832-4842.

We want this newsletter to be a forum to highlight state and local work focusing on economic stability for battered women.

Contact Amy Correia with information about your work.

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The *Building Comprehensive Solutions to Domestic Violence* Paper series is now available on the VAWnet web site. Go to www.vawnet.org/VNL/library/general/bcs_apub.htm for a link to titles on collaboration, housing, economic justice and poverty. Or call the NRC at 800-537-2238