

Domestic Violence Outcome Measures Project Recommendations

Executive Summary

Developed by the Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women's Network in partnership with the Domestic Violence Providers who participated in the DVOM Project

The Domestic Violence Outcome Measures Project, executed by the Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women's Network and its 15 participating member agencies over a period of 3 years, successfully collected information from victims of domestic violence to determine the effectiveness of existing services and to lead to the development of meaningful programs and collaborations, guide policy and legislation, and identify key funding priorities.

Participants were recruited early into their engagement with core services (shelter, counseling, court advocacy, and legal services), and were asked to complete the survey tool 6 months following recruitment. Participants who completed the survey were asked to report their needs both at the time they engaged services and at the time of completing the survey, 6 months later.

The results of these findings were then assessed and analyzed to determine:

- Whether initial needs were met;
- What continuing and/or unmet needs existed;
- Whether there were any significant variations in the answers depending upon participant demographic or family type.

The **four major findings** show:

I. Core services are working and worth the investment.

Core services helped a great deal with emergency safety for most participants and their children; and as a result, immediate safety is no longer a primary concern for most survivors after accessing services for a period of time. Most participants reported the services they received as very effective, and rated the services they received very favorably. The outcomes of services are, overall, very positive.

II. Support for services to help victims **sustain** safety is needed.

Core services generally meet the immediate safety needs of victims, stabilizing their lives so their attention may be turned to sustaining

safety. Survivor-defined sustained safety requires support in several forms: counseling, legal help, housing assistance, financial/ employment help, and healthcare assistance.

Counseling: Survivors find counseling to be a key piece for healing in the immediate and in the long term

- Almost half (46%) report a continuing and sometimes new need for counseling/therapy services
- A quarter of participants (25.5%) indicated a need for family therapy
- A substantial minority of participants report needing help managing contact with the abuser (17.5%)

Recommendations:

- *Fund options for more and/or longer-term counseling;*
- *Fund child visitation support;*
- *Fund support for managing continued contact with the abuser.*

Legal: Complete and safe separation from an abuser requires significant legal resources in both the immediate and the long term, especially when there are children in common.

- A sizeable minority of participants reports both new and continuing needs, for assistance with visitation (13%), child custody (17%), divorce (23%) and immigration (16%)

Recommendations:

- *Fund civil legal services for domestic violence victims for domestic relations and parentage (including post-decree representation) as well as immigration representation;*
- *Fund sliding scale legal services, especially for clients over federal poverty guidelines but unable to afford a lengthy legal process (ex: divorce);*
- *Fund an increased number of Supervised Visitation / Safe*

Exchange programs in the city and suburbs, as well as staff liaisons to the Centers.

Housing: The core service of shelter is critical to meet a victim's emergency safety needs. Beyond emergency shelter, victims need safe, stable, and affordable housing to sustain overall safety and manage other goals and gains in employment, financial stability, and health.

- Nearly 1/3 of participants (30.8%) identified help finding permanent housing as a current need
- Help with permanent housing was mentioned by a sizeable percentage of Asians and Latinas

Recommendations:

- *Fund housing and transportation services that include streamlined access for homeless domestic violence survivors;*
- *Fund transitional housing in addition to longer-term shelter to help stabilize clients, particularly those in immigrant communities;*
- *Fund advocacy for long-term housing.*

Financial/ Employment: In conjunction with accessing services, victims' economic circumstances improved greatly; however, there is much ground to cover to ensure a victim's financial independence.

- Participants report a near doubling of income 6 months after engaging services; however, participants' improved income is mostly attributed to enrollment in public welfare benefits, and income mostly remained at the poverty or near poverty level.
- Over a quarter of participants reported a need for help with economic and material concerns, either in the form of permanent housing, emergency cash (25.7%), help with credit history (29.3%), financial planning/literacy (28%), food/clothing, (28.6%) healthcare (22%), or work (24.9%). Fewer participants reported that services helped a lot with these concerns than with other issues. Of people who reported a current need for these services, a

high percentage (compared to other categories of needs) reported that these needs were unmet previously or that they were new needs.

Recommendations:

- *Provide more emergency assistance to survivors and ease restrictions so that survivors have greater access to assistance (geography, income brackets, immigration, etc.);*
- *Fund support for more complex financial issues that many victims face as a result of financial abuse (identity theft, fraud, recouping poor credit, etc.);*
- *Fund part or full-time financial empowerment staff to explore non-traditional, green sector, and tech job opportunities for victims;*
- *Support diverse economic empowerment: entrepreneurial/ small business development as well as initiatives geared toward immigrants.*

III. Generally, participant demographics had minimal impact on experiences.

There were few differences in outcomes of services or current needs for help by race/ethnicity, socio-economic level, or parenting status. Help with immigration and translation, as well as a need for permanent housing, were mentioned by a sizeable percentage of Asians and Latinas.

IV. Ongoing data in collection is necessary for informed decision making.

Support is needed for individual agencies to initiate and/or continue their own individual program evaluation. This data helps determine efficiency and effectiveness at the agency level.

Instituting community-wide evaluation on an ongoing basis is critical for two reasons: first, to ensure core services and other existing program offerings are meeting the needs of survivors, and second, to shape the future of this work, by developing meaningful programs and collaborations, guiding policy and legislation, and identifying key funding priorities.

This level of data collection is a job in itself. Ongoing evaluation requires continued investment in a Project Coordinator, who trains and coordinates staff across the participating agencies to continue robust recruitment and facilitate timely survey completion. Continued investment in the project also ensures incentives remain a viable part of the recruitment and retention efforts.

Through continued and expanded investment in this project, there is also an opportunity to collect additional data from: 1) individuals who engaged in services but did not continue for a host of reasons; 2) individuals who elected not to engage in services; and 3) individuals who experienced barriers accessing services in any capacity. Capturing this additional data would permit a fuller analysis and better inform the process of developing meaningful programs and collaborations, guiding policy and legislation, and identifying key funding priorities to reach all survivors of domestic violence in a meaningful way.