

disAbility Advocacy Project

Washington State's Collaboration to Improve Domestic and Sexual Violence Advocacy for People with disAbilities and Deaf Individuals

Charter adopted June 11, 2007

Article 1 - Vision and Mission Statements, Goals, and Guiding Principles for our Work

1-1 Vision Statement

The vision of the disAbility Advocacy Project is that people with disabilities and Deaf individuals who experience domestic or sexual violence are aware of the range of services that are available to them and they have the same access to those services as others. We believe that all people should have equal opportunity to participate in a society where *Abilities*, rather than *disabilities*, are recognized.

1-2 Mission Statement

The mission of the disAbility Advocacy Project is to build partnerships between community-based domestic and sexual violence advocacy organizations, community-based disability advocacy organizations, and people with disabilities who experience domestic or sexual violence. These partnerships will work to improve access to services, reach out to other survivors with disabilities, and honor and respect the choices made by survivors.

1-3 Goals for our Work

Our collaboration will:

- Learn from people with disabilities about their experiences of domestic and sexual violence and the barriers they face when seeking services.
- Improve the accessibility of our partner organizations (physically, programmatically, and attitudinally).
- Identify current partner organization activities that can be informed and improved by the work of this project.
- Support and enhance local partnerships between community-based domestic or sexual violence advocates and disability advocates.
- Plan to sustain our work and the statewide network beyond the life of the grant.
- Create a statewide network of individuals & organizations who will act to improve services for people with disabilities and Deaf individuals who experience domestic or sexual violence.

- Provide technical assistance to domestic violence advocacy programs, sexual assault advocacy programs, and organizations that advocate for people with disabilities.

1-4 Guiding Principles - Checks and balances that drive our work

When disagreements over proposed actions by the collaboration occur, the collaboration, when seeking to resolve those disagreements, will be guided by the following three questions.

1. Does this action respect the survivor's decisions?
2. Does this action advance the accountability of individuals and groups to stop sexual and domestic violence?
3. Does this action change the conditions that allow sexual and domestic violence to happen in our communities?

Article 2 - Definition of Terms

2-1 Access and Accessibility

When we talk about "access" or "accessibility," we mean that individuals who have a disability have an equivalent ability to obtain services as other individuals. Access includes physical access, communication access, and programmatic access.

2-2 Co-advocacy

When we talk about "co-advocacy," we mean when advocates from different disciplines collaborate to provide the best possible solution for an advocacy problem.

2-3 Community-based

When we talk about "community-based" advocacy services, we mean advocacy services that are provided based on the choices of the survivor, and are provided by advocates who do not work for a government agency or a for-profit organization. Community-based advocacy is different than system-based advocacy, where advocates work for a police department, prosecutor's office, or government social service agency and provide services based on the wishes of that agency or office.

2-4 disAbility

When we talk about "disability," we mean anyone with mobility, sensory, or communication issues; mental illness, intellectual or developmental disabilities; anyone who is Deaf or has hearing loss. We also include people who have "invisible" disabilities, such as diabetes, traumatic brain injuries or substance use disorders.

2-5 Deaf

When we talk about people who are “Deaf,” we mean individuals who identify as being a part of Deaf culture. We recognize that some Deaf individuals do not identify as having disabilities, but we include the Deaf community in our definition of disability to ensure their inclusion in our work and to recognize that Deaf individuals who are abused do not have the same access to services as other individuals.

2-6 Domestic Violence

When we talk about “domestic violence,” we mean when someone in an intimate relationship tries to control the other person through fear, threats, or violence. The person who tries to gain this control is an abuser and the abuse can happen in many ways. The abuser can gain control by making the other person feel isolated, afraid of physical harm, afraid of the loss of their money or their independence. Abusers often criticize the other person to make them feel bad about themselves. Sexual violence can also be a way the abuser gains control. The abuser may get back at the person if they try to resist or tell other people about the abuse. An abuser can be a boyfriend, girlfriend, husband, wife, or a caregiver/personal attendant.

2-7 Sexual Violence

When we talk about “sexual violence,” we mean when a person is forced or manipulated into doing something sexual that the person doesn’t want to do. Sexual violence can be an assault by someone that is known or a stranger. It also includes unwanted sexual comments, violating a person’s boundaries, or sexual harassment. Sexual violence is any behavior of a sexual nature that makes you feel uncomfortable.

2-8 Stalking

When we talk about “stalking,” we mean when an abuser repeatedly torments or terrorizes another person. Stalkers often send annoying, embarrassing, threatening or obscene e-mail, letters or phone calls. The stalker may follow or lay in wait for the victim or damage their property. A stalker may threaten the victim, the victim’s children, relatives, or pets. Stalkers often use e-mail or other electronic devices. A stalker may repeatedly send the victim unwanted gifts.

Article 3 - Values & Assumptions

3-1 Self-determination of Survivors

We recognize that individuals are generally best able to maintain their safety when they control their services and supports. Therefore, our approach focuses on the wishes and choices of survivors rather than on what a service provider may perceive to be in the survivor’s best interest. We will work to

strengthen the autonomy and safety of survivors with disabilities in their own communities by:

- Increasing advocacy skills and encouraging co-advocacy between domestic and sexual violence and disability advocacy organizations.
- Supporting leadership by survivors with disabilities to identify strategies that increase independence and safety.
- Improving access to services at domestic and sexual violence organizations.
- Identifying policies, practices and funding systems at the state and local level which create barriers to access for survivors with disabilities.
- Documenting a wide range of strategies that may be utilized by community-based advocacy organizations that lead to the removal of barriers to services.
- Disseminating those strategies to community-based advocacy organizations throughout the state.

3-2 Survivors are the Experts

The collaboration believes that the primary experts on violence against people with disabilities are the individuals who experience that violence. The expertise of survivors will inform the work of the collaboration. We will include survivors with disabilities in all stages of our collaboration. Specifically, we will seek their input during planning, implementation, and evaluation.

3-3 Building a Broader Network in the Community

Our collaboration will grow beyond our initial partnership. The collaboration will develop a message that appeals to the larger community. We will seek to create a broad network of advocates, survivors and other interested community members. We will invite individuals and organizations within our broad network to take action in the community.

3-4 Domestic and Sexual Violence Programs

We are committed to making community-based domestic violence and sexual assault programs fully accessible. We will encourage them to create relationships with disability advocates and organizations.

3-5 Disability Advocacy Organizations

We are committed to disability advocacy organizations becoming more familiar with the dynamics of domestic and sexual violence. We will encourage them to create relationships with community-based domestic and sexual violence advocates and their organizations.

3-6 Integrating the Work into the Partner Organizations

Each partner commits to integrating culturally competent, respectful, accessible services into their agencies, ensuring that access for people with disabilities is not merely an "add-on" issue. Our collaboration will model the changes we wish to see in the community as a whole.

Article 4 - Member Organizations, Roles & Contributions

4-1 Partner Organizations

There are four partner organizations in the collaboration. They are:

- **Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WSCADV).**

WSCADV is the leading voice to end domestic violence in Washington state. Founded in 1990 by domestic violence survivors and their allies, the Coalition is a non-profit network of 65 independent member programs that serve survivors across the state. WSCADV is committed to ending domestic violence through advocacy and action for social change.

- **Abused Deaf Women's Advocacy Services (ADWAS).**

ADWAS is committed to providing services to Deaf and Deaf-Blind victims of sexual assault and/or domestic violence. The mission of ADWAS is a belief that violence is a learned behavior and it should not be tolerated. ADWAS was established in 1986 and is located in Seattle, Washington. The ADWAS model has been replicated in 14 other cities across the United States. ADWAS is committed to providing accessible and safe housing for Deaf and Deaf-Blind women and their children.

- **Disability Rights Washington (DRW)**

DRW is a private non-profit organization that protects the rights of people with disabilities statewide. Their mission is to advance the dignity, equality, and self-determination of people with disabilities. DRW works to pursue justice on matters related to human and legal rights. DRW works for change in policies, laws, and systems that promote freedom from abuse and neglect, legal rights and responsibilities, adequately funded supports and services, and communities that involve everyone.

- **Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs (WCSAP)**

WCSAP's mission is to unite agencies engaged in the elimination of sexual violence through education, advocacy, victim services and social change. WCSAP views sexual assault as a means of power, control, and manipulation of others and as a social phenomenon which adversely affects adults and children. WCSAP supports efforts to create an atmosphere of non-violence through social change and is committed to empowering survivors and eliminating sexual assault.

4-2 Memorandum of Understanding

Each partner agency has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that describes the roles and responsibilities of each partner organization and the history of the collaboration (dating to the year 2000). The MOU has been signed by the executive director of each organization.

4-3 Lead Agency

WSCADV will act as the lead agency for the project, managing and coordinating day-to-day grant activities. Activities will include coordinating meetings, managing communications among partners, administering grant funds, maintaining a work schedule, and providing fiscal and program accountability.

4-4 Fulfillment of Responsibilities

All partner organizations agree to collaborate with the other partners and to take on responsibilities and tasks that are consistent with the roles and responsibilities described in the MOU. Each partner agrees to complete tasks and activities as agreed upon, including activities relating to the development of an in-depth needs assessment, analysis of collected data, the creation and implementation of a strategic plan, the development of products, and project evaluation. Each partner agrees to actively integrate the work of the collaboration into their own organization.

4-5 Building and Enhancing Relationships

Each partner in the collaboration has extensive existing relationships with many survivors, advocates, and advocacy or provider groups. The collaboration will foster these relationships and work with these groups to identify technical assistance needs through cross-discipline collaboration and outreach initiatives.

4-6 Sharing Expertise

Each partner has knowledge and expertise that is valuable to the collaboration. The partners are committed to sharing their own knowledge among the core collaborators and in the broader network. Additionally, each partner is committed to learning from the knowledge and expertise of the other partners.

4-7 Sustainability of the Collaboration

Each partner organization is committed to the sustainability of the project. Each partner will work to develop and implement a sustainability plan to support project activities into the future.

Article 5 - Policies, Practice and Work Schedule

5-1 Collaboration Structure

The collaboration will have a structure that encourages group participation in decisions and individual responsibility for the completion of agreed upon activities. No one partner is in charge of establishing policy or procedures, assigning tasks, or making decisions that affect the entire collaboration. Such decisions are made on a consensus basis with all partners at the table. WSCADV shall have responsibility for developing agendas, facilitating

meetings and providing reasonable accommodations to participants and guests.

5-2 Decision Making Process

Decisions affecting the collaboration may be made at scheduled partner meetings or through phone, email or other direct contact. Decisions will be made by consensus of the collaboration. Meetings will be run in a manner that encourages participation, trust and full involvement of all partners. The collaboration will refer to the Mission and Vision statements and to the Guiding Principles to provide guidance in decision-making.

5-3 Conflict Resolution Process

When conflicts or disagreements arise, they will be addressed by all parties in a manner that respects the differing approaches, constraints and values of the organizations involved. All partners are invested in resolving conflicts within the collaboration and the collaborative has several members who are skilled and experienced facilitators. Any partner may be asked to facilitate a discussion aimed at working out a problem to everyone's satisfaction, and a variety of techniques may be employed to achieve consensus. In the event that internal facilitation fails to resolve the conflict, the collaborative may seek an outside, experienced facilitator to assist the group in reaching a consensual resolution to the problem. Any outside facilitator will be chosen by the group and be acceptable to all of the involved parties.

5-4 Internal Communication Plan

The collaboration is committed to developing and sustaining effective communication among all partner organizations. The collaboration has an internal communication plan that includes, but is not limited to the following elements:

- The lead agency shall notify the partners of meetings and proposed agenda items for those meetings in a timely fashion. Any partner may request that additional subjects be addressed by the group at anytime.
- Each partner is committed to maintaining open and forthright communication between all other partners. It is expected that communication is not limited to scheduled meetings, but is ongoing. Partners are encouraged to inform other partners of events that are relevant to our work.
- Each partner is committed to resolving conflicts in a forthright and responsible manner (see 5-3).
- Partner organizations will actively maintain a presence at appropriate conferences, meetings and gatherings sponsored by other partner agencies.
- Each partner is committed to ensuring that every partner has equivalent access to communication within the collaboration. Interpreters shall be available at all meetings and other gatherings

where a partner requests them. The requesting partner shall be able to identify her or his preferred interpreters.

- Communication between partners is not limited to scheduled meeting time. The collaboration acknowledges that significant work is accomplished during breaks, meal times and other non-working time when partners are gathered. Each partner shall have equivalent access to effective communication during these informal work opportunities. Whenever possible, interpreters, assistive technology or other reasonable accommodations shall be available upon request to ensure effective communication.

5-5 Partner Meetings

The collaboration will plan to meet at least ten times annually, with scheduled meetings lasting two hours. The partners will communicate as needed by phone, email, or in person between scheduled meetings. The work of the collaboration will be reviewed at each meeting. Completed tasks will be noted and outcomes discussed. Potential work plans will be considered and the responsibility for completing any specific tasks will be mutually agreed upon. The need to adjust, update or alter current work plans will be discussed and changed on a consensus basis. When work plans need to be discussed prior to a meeting, the partners will communicate by phone, email or in person.

5-6 Confidentiality Plan

The collaboration acknowledges that confidentiality plays a key role in promoting the safety of survivors. Each partner organization has shared their own organization's confidentiality policies with others in the collaborative. The organizations' policies are highly compatible and the partners have agreed that no communication, documentation or other information that could identify a survivor shall be shared absent a signed release from the survivor.

The subject of "mandatory reporting" raises complex issues and is worth discussing here. Washington state law describes individuals who are required to report suspected cases of abuse or neglect of "vulnerable adults" to state authorities and, in some cases, to law enforcement. Additionally, funding requirements carry similar requirements in some cases. The term vulnerable adult, as defined in the law, includes some individuals who have disabilities.

Among members of our collaborative, some partner organizations have mandatory reporting requirements, while others do not. The collaboration recognizes that mandatory reporting requirements may eliminate or compromise some choices a survivor may choose to make. Therefore, prior to engaging in any discussion of issues of domestic or sexual violence when a vulnerable adult may be present, the collaborative will take the following steps.

1. The individual who may be a vulnerable adult shall be made aware of mandatory reporting requirements and potential implications.
2. This communication shall be conducted in a manner ensuring that the individual understands the law and its implications, and has an opportunity to decide whether to continue the conversation and/or request that certain partners not be present during the discussion.

5-7 External Communications Plan

The collaboration is committed to sharing its work with its broader network and with the community. The collaboration shall develop an external communication plan that includes, but is not limited to the following elements:

- Create and maintain an email distribution list to inform partners, the broader network and the community of activities planned or completed, information gleaned, and successes and challenges encountered by the collaboration.
- Develop and maintain relationships with other advocates, survivors, and community members interested in our work.
- Actively seek out and maintain a presence at conferences, meetings and gatherings of people with disabilities and advocates. Develop strategies and tools to inform and invite participation in our work.
- Creatively pursue opportunities to inform advocates and people with disabilities about the work of the collaboration and how the community may become part of the work.

5-8 Utilization of Resources

The collaboration is committed to efficient and effective planning for the utilization of resources. Each partner organization will identify areas and issues about which the collaboration may benefit from technical assistance from the Vera Institute for Justice.

5-9 Accessibility Plans

Each partner agrees to develop and implement an internal agency plan to increase accessibility that addresses service and employment issues.

5-10 Changes to the Collaboration Structure

Any partner may suggest organizational changes to the collaboration. Proposed changes shall be discussed at subsequent meetings.

5-11 Work Plan

The collaboration work plan will include the following activities:

June 2007

In consultation with the Vera Institute for Justice (Vera) and the Office on Violence against Women (OVW), finalize a

	collaboration charter and needs assessment plan.
July – Oct. 2007	Implement the needs assessment plan, compile data.
Nov. – Dec. 2007	Analyze data, create needs assessment findings. In consultation with Vera and OVW, create a strategic plan for 2008 – 2009.
Jan. 2008 – Sept. 2009	Implement strategic plan, develop a sustainability plan, evaluate project activities.

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