



SURVIVOR-LED ADVOCACY

Principles and discussion

SURVIVOR-LED ADVOCACY IS EXACTLY WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE!

Survivor-driven, trauma-informed advocacy means working in partnership with survivors.

Advocacy is focused on safety and supporting survivors to rebuild control over their lives.

Survivors lead the process, choose their own goals, and define what is going to be safest for themselves.



DISCUSSION POINTS

Philosophical and logistical underpinnings of domestic violence survivor services

- Trauma-informed, survivor-led

A case example

How you can help as friends and family to survivors in your life

How you can support your local DV organizations

SURVIVOR-LED ADVOCACY

Survivor-led, or survivor-centered, advocacy is comprehensive and individualized. It is a method to work with survivors that strives to meet their individual needs, as they define and prioritize them

In general, the people closest to the problem are always going to know the most about the solutions they need. Survivors are the people closest to the problem, so they are the experts we must consult with in trying to support them.

In practice, this means that while we have a whole host of available services and resources, participation in services is *optional* and *voluntary* for both residential and non-residential clients

- This can be frustrating for anyone who wants a survivor to take part in a service like DVPOs or shelter
- We understand that, too!

SURVIVOR-LED ADVOCACY IS TRAUMA-INFORMED

Trauma-informed practices are organizational philosophies, approaches, services, etc. that recognize the prevalence and effects of trauma on individuals and respond to them without shaming, blaming, or re-traumatizing.

1. Safety
2. Trustworthiness and Transparency
3. Choice
4. Collaboration and Mutuality
5. Empowerment

SURVIVOR-LED ADVOCACY IS TRAUMA-INFORMED

1. Safety

- Advocates recognize that survivors have the most information and knowledge to inform safety strategies and that trying to pressure a person into a specific safety option creates a psychologically unsafe situation for survivors

2. Trustworthiness and Transparency

- Advocates do not assume that we deserve the trust of survivors and aim to be trustworthy by being respectful of boundaries placed by clients and centering their feelings, needs, and wants. We communicate openly about our limitations and boundaries.

3. Choice

- The loss of control and agency is one of the most difficult and traumatizing aspects for survivors; it is important for advocates not to introduce another controlling, abusive relationship by trying to control survivors. We can speak to our concerns about a survivor's plan, provide information and context to help them in their decision, but the choice is theirs.

4. Collaboration and Mutuality

- When a survivor has chosen their goals, we provide wrap-around services to help them meet that goal. The primary work to meet goals takes place on the part of survivors and we support.

5. Empowerment

- We focus on strengths and strength-building with clients and underscore the ways they have control and power over their lives.

SURVIVOR-LED ADVOCACY PROCESS

The client's needs and wellbeing are always the primary concern in the approach

- If I need to collect demographic information and the client is in distress, data collection takes a back seat to responding compassionately to distress

We generally start with safety planning – performing a risk assessment, providing an explanation and context for what the assessment tells us, asking about resources, events, needs, and wants so that the client has an individualized safety plan that builds on their strengths and available resources.

We encourage clients to develop their plan at their pace – offering opportunities to talk and develop them while respecting the clients need for rest and introspection

- Plans can involve long term and short term goals, and anything from obtaining work or higher education, seeking mental health treatment, or learning to co-parent with an abuser.

WHAT I DO

DV Specialists are placed around the state to work with survivors with children who are involved with child protection systems

DV Specialist goals are to:

- Increase safety for adult victim
- Advocate for keeping children with protective parents
- Hold offenders accountable for their abuse and its affect on the family
- Ensure policy is followed

We use a specialized tool called a SAF(e)R Assessment to put the abuse history into a context that CPS workers can understand and work with under their policies and procedures

HELPING FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Start by believing - understand that trauma results in fractured memory processes, so stories may not have a narrative or chronological flow

Withhold judgement – survivors do what they must to survive, and that doesn't always make sense to those outside of the experience.

Recognize that survivors are experts on their own circumstances – they may not need or want advice, and instead need someone to listen to them

Let survivors lead – ask them how they would like to be supported and respect their wishes

HELPING YOUR LOCAL AGENCY

Follow their social media pages and respond to requests for specific items

Donate unrestricted funds

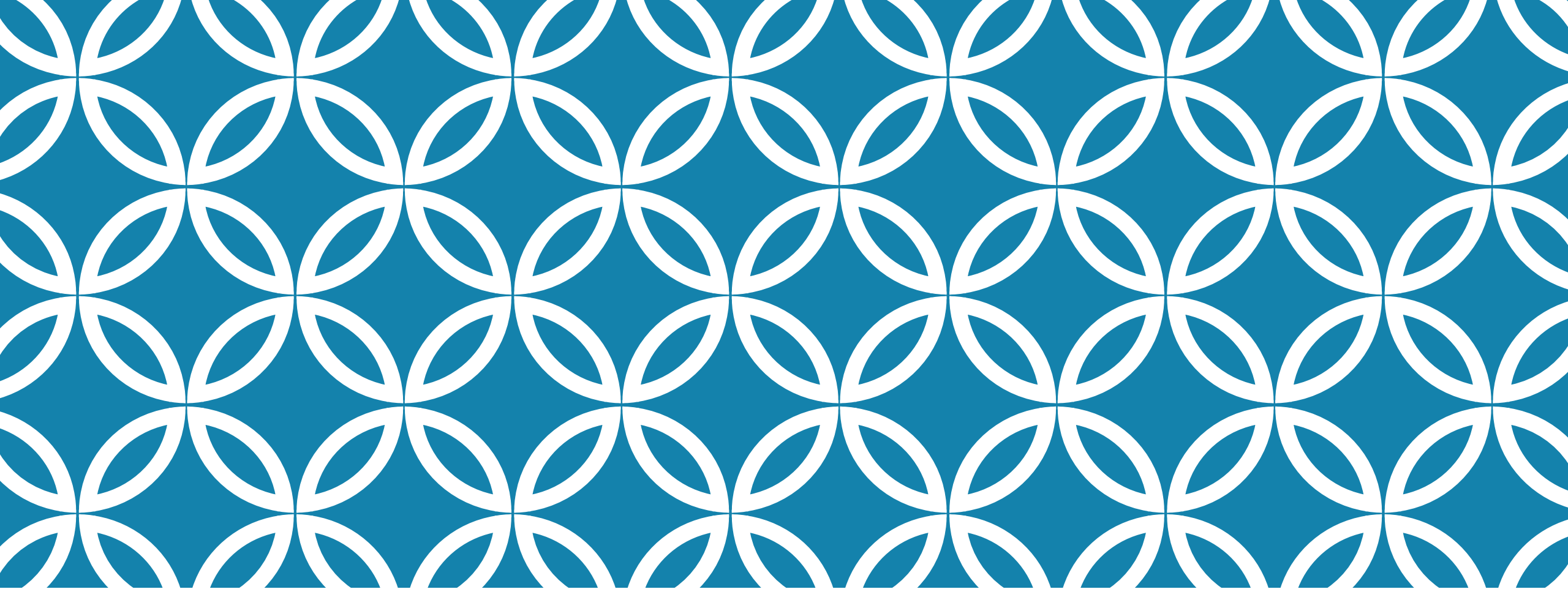
- Grant funds may be limited in what they can be used for and programs may be experiencing cuts
- Programs may be able to get more for their money than you can – e.g., we are able to purchase food from a state agency at a reduced cost

Volunteer

Attend their events and help spread the word when you can

Participate in their online events such as awareness campaigns, book clubs, etc

Request speakers from your local agency



WHAT QUESTIONS DO WE HAVE?

Thank you for your time and attention!