SECTION: Non-Shelter/Community-Based Services
TOPIC TITLE: Mobile Advocacy

Importance of Topic:

For a variety of reasons, not all clients are able to access services on-site or in shelter. By meeting with clients in a variety of community spaces, such as libraries, local restaurants or coffee shops, or even in certain circumstances, the homes of clients or family members, we can reach clients who otherwise might not be able to receive help. Providing community-based services can eliminate barriers to service, such as a lack of transportation, and can also make clients more comfortable and receptive to receiving services. The roots of the movement were based in meeting people where they were, in community, with limited barriers to accessing support - mobile advocacy promotes these same values and creates better outcomes for some survivors for whom this strategy best meets their needs.

Statutes/Professional Standards:

- Code of Virginia Reference: None

- [Professional Standards Reference](#):

    - STANDARD #12: Sexual and Domestic Violence Agencies will provide a range of individualized advocacy services which foster survivor healing from the trauma of violence.

    - STANDARD #13: Sexual and Domestic Violence Agencies will coordinate services within the agency and the community to promote high quality integrated services and support to survivors.

    - STANDARD #15: Sexual and Domestic Violence Agencies will participate in community engagement efforts that promote agency services and effective community responses throughout the agency's service area.

Terms Used or Needed to Understand this Topic:

Community engagement: Advocates working in the community to build lasting connections with the goal of engaging community members in supporting survivors' safety, independence, and housing stability. ([Source](#))

Mobile Advocacy: Physically meeting survivors in the location of their choice to provide advocacy, support, and resources that best meet the survivor's needs. ([Source](#))

Did You Know?

Technology has made working off-site increasingly accessible. However, it is important to practice caution whenever using spaces that offer public Wifi, especially when accessing confidential information. Public Wifi networks are often insecure and vulnerable to interception. Using resources such as a virtual private network (VPN) or using a data plan within the device are additional steps for privacy and safety. Using a landline to make direct phone calls to survivors with a landline could be a safe option for communication.

Racial/Social Justice Focus:

Many individuals may have a history or experience that impacts their ability to trust other community systems, which can extend to options for mobile and offsite services. Does the survivor feel comfortable meeting at the police department? What if their community is small and there is only one local coffee shop or library, which has heavy foot traffic? Do their lived experiences impact feeling comfortable receiving advocacy services in other spaces? Do they need to meet in an informal setting like a coffee shop or their home vs. a more formal setting like an office?

Scenario 1: An advocate is engaging with a survivor over the hotline, who has shared that they cannot come to the outreach office due to the proximity to their abuser's place of work. Their phone is heavily monitored, and is only able to make brief calls at a friend's house. The advocate offers alternative mobile services in order for the survivor to meet in person and get their needs met. One immediate option is in a secluded building that is not public transportation accessible, but has multiple spaces for advocates to meet privately. Another immediate option is at the library, where a private space is available.

- What are some immediate barriers that may arise from the current options? How could an advocate provide support for transportation access needs?

- In small communities, visibility can be a concern for survivors needing services. What are creative ways to meet with someone in a public place without raising any attention towards yourselves? Could you meet for lunch at a cafe? Walk together in the farmer's market?

- How might staff strategize about their own safety in mobile advocacy?

Scenario 2: Chantelle would like to meet with a community advocate and finds out from the website that there is a satellite office near her home. Upon closer inspection, she realizes that the satellite office is located within the local police department. Chantelle and her family have experienced family trauma with law enforcement, and as a result, she feels a deep mistrust with them. She is not able to meet at the main office, due it being further away and having limited gas funds.

- Spaces such as police departments, schools, hospitals, and other community based organizations can be perceived differently for people depending on prior experiences with these entities. How can you help affirm their experiences while also building rapport and trust between each other?

- How can the community advocate accommodate Chantelle in meeting with her close to home? Can the agency provide gas money support?

Trauma-informed Focus:

Survivors seeking services may have several barriers that limit their ability to seek services in a shelter or office setting. Barriers may include lack of transportation, lack of support systems, desire to receive services without separating from their abusive partner, language and/or cultural barriers, etc. It is important for advocates to consider being flexible and open-minded when it comes to providing services in non-traditional settings to individuals requesting them. Carefully consider where you and the survivor can have the most productive conversation, while addressing their privacy and safety concerns. Survivors may have additional transportation costs and assistance to be able to meet with an advocate in the community. Creating an atmosphere that is relaxed, actively working towards gaining

the client's trust, displays respect, and fosters a sense of genuine concern and sincere interest for the client will support creating a trauma-informed meeting. Sometimes the survivor may not be able to meet, due to safety concerns or a change of situation - remaining flexible and accommodating to change the meeting date and location is helpful to affirm that their time is valued and honored. Mobile advocacy can also provide a deeper understanding of the context of a survivor's life, thus aiding an advocate in providing more meaningful support and resources.

Promising Practices:

Overview of General Characteristics:

- Offsite services are available at diverse locations spanning geography, community resources, and accessibility.

- Safety planning is always a central component of planning and providing a mobile service. Staff discusses alternative plans concerning needing to end a meeting quickly, what to do if an abuser becomes close to proximity, etc.

- Use of technology is ideally through agency provided hardware. If using a personal device, use of a shared phone/text app, agency cloud software, etc. is additionally used to protect privacy of staff and clients.

- Agencies develop and strengthen relationships with community spaces and entities to provide flexible spaces for off site/mobile services.

- Survivors are centered in determining which strategy works best for their situation through ongoing conversations with their advocate.

Examples:

- **Safe Harbor** has partnered with a neighboring community-based agency, **Sacred Heart Center** (SHC) to provide services at their facility that is closer to the Latinx population in their community. As SHC is a trusted agency by the community, the partnership has provided an opportunity to enhance mobile services to survivors. Additionally, SHC has supported Safe Harbor with transportation and childcare needs of their clients. Challenges that Safe Harbor overcame to develop this promising practice include finding bilingual and bicultural staff, as well as gaining

trust by the community. During COVID-19, Safe Harbor purchased laptops that are housed at SHC so that clients are able to go to the center and still have access to privacy, transportation, and childcare during their counseling sessions.

- **Southside Center for Violence Prevention, Inc.** approached barriers of transportation and accessibility to case meetings and counseling by collaborating with allied agencies to utilize office space. By sharing office space settings, SCVP has built strong connections to community members and agencies to help meet clients where they are. Challenges to develop this promising practice mainly centered around scheduling with other agencies. During COVID-19, SCVP has had to make adjustments with staffing in certain locations due to office closures. However, they have been able to maintain flexibility and access if there was a client in need of scheduling an in person appointment.

Program Focus:

- Does your organization provide ongoing training on mobile advocacy practices?

- What are some situations in mobile advocacy that may occur outside of a typical office setting? How can staff best prepare?

- Consider transportation access and costs when planning an offsite advocacy meeting. Does your client need support with bus passes or an Uber?

- If your organization depends on technology for mobile services, what kinds of tech safety training and tools is your agency investing in to address site-related safety concerns?

Client voice:

How safe did you feel working with an advocate online?
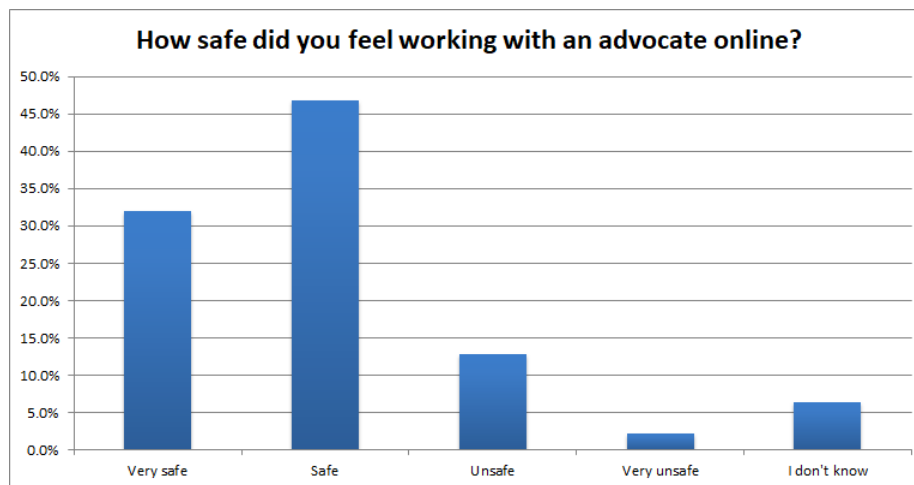
Data from Survivor Voice Survey, 2021

COVID-19 Focus:

Mobile services may have already been in place at your agency at the beginning of COVID-19. Other agencies may be learning to rely on virtual services for the first time. With communal buildings no longer accessible to the public, new platforms are being engaged for support services which reach out to survivors. Agencies should be sure to publicize these changes to make outreach from survivors easier. Survivors should also be told the risks of mobile services and make choices on which virtual platform works best for them. These choices should help protect their data and keep them safe, as well as be convenient for their current schedule which may be more affected by pandemic related burdens. (job searching, homeschooling children, etc.).

During COVID-19:

- How will your organization implement and promote the virtual services you will offer? What software will you use and how will you manage technical problems which may interfere with service provision?

- How will you continue to keep survivors' safe while providing virtual services?

- How will you provide services to survivors who do not have steady internet access?

- How will your organization utilize personal protective equipment and social distancing strategies to continue to meet survivors in person in the community? What will your agency do if previously utilized spaces do not fully re-open?

Additional Resources + Links:

Video:

- [Mobile Advocacy Policy](#) (4:01): A general overview about considering the options of meeting clients at other locations.

Publications/Collections:

- [Mobile Advocacy](#): A 1-page infographic from the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

- [Mobile Advocacy Toolkit](#): A UK-based toolkit exploring what mobile advocacy is various strategies to effectively implement mobile advocacy in a community

- [Best Practices When Using Mobile Devices for Mobile Advocacy](#): An overview of safety considerations.

- [Tips and Tools for Mobile Advocacy](#): A 4-page summary of options for meeting with clients at other locations, including in someone's home.

- National Network to End Domestic Violence's [Technology Safety Plan Guide](#)