



Resource Sharing Project Rural Training & Technical Assistance

A Welcoming Introduction to Services

*by Leah Green,
with help from
the Firecracker
Foundation*

For survivors of sexual violence, our programs can sometimes feel intimidating and scary. So many questions bubble up in the minds of survivors. *Will they make me tell my story? Will I be pushed into having to talk to law enforcement? What even happens in this office? Is this like therapy? What will healing feel like? How will they fix what happened to me?* A warm and intentional welcome to services can put many fears and anxieties at ease. Our introduction to services sets the tone for the rest of our program's relationship with the survivor. We want to make sure they walk away feeling confident in our collaborative relationship.



The intake process helps us introduce the survivor to our program and allows the survivor to share their needs, goals, strengths, and resources. As we orient survivors to our program we can explain our approach to services, set boundaries, and outline confidentiality. Being transparent with survivors about our programs builds trust, safety, and choice, which sets up trauma-informed care from the start. The survivor never needs to share their experiences of sexual violence, only the fact that they would like to seek services. Sharing specific details about the assault or the perpetrator isn't necessary and can be very difficult for survivors. We can engage survivors in conversations about boundaries, coping mechanisms, personal definitions of healing and future goals, all without knowing about the violence itself.

Giving survivors information to take with them when they leave is a trauma informed approach which can continue to alleviate survivor's concerns. Providing information in a tangible form gives survivors something to reference when they have questions or to soothe anxieties about moving forward or before the next appointment. Your program could provide survivors:

- A card with the next appointment time and date written down
- Information about services and common reasons why folks seek services
- The crisis and support line number for 24-hour support with a list of ways the survivor could use the support (dealing with shame after an appointment, having someone guide you through a grounding technique)
- Some of the positive outcomes that may happen as a result of continuing services (regaining a feeling of control over life circumstances, finding a larger support system)
- An object to hold or keep with them as a reminder of the support they receive such as a stone, coin, pendant, or even lip balm with the agency logo

On the following page is an example of a letter which could be given to survivors during intake. This example is based on a letter one program, The Firecracker Foundation, gives to welcome survivors into services and remind them of the program's ongoing support. A version of this letter could be given to survivors and their loved ones in hospital settings, during intake, or other entry points into services.



Dear Survivor:

You are taking an important step.

Despite terrible circumstances, you are bravely stepping forward and entering a place of healing. It takes bravery to ask for help and grace to accept it.

Thank you so very much.

Delving into trauma issues can be difficult for you and your entire support system. As a reminder, we provide advocacy and educational services to loved ones as well.

You are now a part of the [program] family. As such, you have access to any program offerings we have available now and into the future. If you decide to pursue trauma-sensitive yoga, our peer-led support group, or any services provided by our organization or local partners—we've got your back.

The healing of your whole being is our highest priority. You can count on [program] to work diligently for as long as necessary to support your healing journey.

Your therapy costs will be paid for by donors who believe that you deserve the support of the entire community as you begin to challenge the struggles you face as a survivor of sexual trauma.

I have complete confidence in the experience and abilities of the [program name] team, but should you ever have any questions or concerns, you can call me at ###-###-####.

Sincerely,

Program Coordinator

Now let's break this down paragraph by paragraph and see what this letter accomplishes for survivors of sexual violence:

"You are taking an important step. Despite terrible circumstances, you are bravely stepping forward and entering a place of healing. It takes bravery to ask for help and grace to accept it."

This is a warm acknowledgment of the difficulty of starting this journey while reinforcing its importance.

"Delving into trauma issues can be difficult for you and your entire support system. As a reminder, we provide advocacy and educational services to loved ones as well."

Sexual violence impacts more than just the survivor. Acknowledging that loved ones will be impacted helps survivors prepare for the difficulties they may face and reminds them that support exists for everyone.

***"You are now a part of the [program] family.** As such, you have access to any program offerings we have available now and into the future. If you decide to pursue trauma-sensitive yoga, our peer-led support group, or any services provided by our organization or local partners – we've got your back."*

In the coming months and years, survivors may change their relationship with trauma and their survivorship. We can proactively invite survivors into future services by outlining services across the lifespan.

“The healing of your whole being is our highest priority. You can count on [program] to work diligently for as long as necessary to support your healing journey.”

It is important to stress that services are available for as long the survivor needs them. Healing isn't linear, so we want survivors to know that our services aren't either. We are available at many times during the survivor's life and for as long as they need.

“Your therapy costs will be paid for by donors who believe that you deserve the support of the entire community as you begin to challenge the struggles you face as a survivor of sexual trauma.”

This letter includes specific information about how the community has assisted the program in meeting the needs of survivors. This helps survivors feel less alone and more supported.

“I have complete confidence in the experience and abilities of the [program name] team, but should you ever have any questions or concerns, you can call me at ###-###-####.”

The ending paragraph invites survivors to evaluate and provide feedback about program services.

As a staff, sit down and discuss this letter. Consider these questions:

- What did you like about the letter?
- What stood out to you as helpful?
- What need does this letter fulfill for survivors?
- Is this letter in line with your mission statement? How?
- How would a letter like this strengthen your intake process or reinforce the ideas you share during intake?
- If you wrote a letter like this for the survivors in your community, what would be most important for your program to include?
- What do you want to make sure survivors walk away knowing and being able to hold on to?
- If your program wrote a letter, would that be the best format? Should it be a letter, a brochure, a zine, a packet, a binder, etc?
- What audiences would it be most important to address?

As you continue the conversation, spend time discussing what makes you feel invited in to a space and use that information to inform the discussion. Often when we feel welcomed in to a space it is because we feel a sense of hospitality. Consider these questions:

- How would you want to be welcomed into services?
- What has made you feel welcomed in a new space in the past?
- What have survivors told you would have been helpful to know at the beginning of services?
- In what ways has your community supported your program? What would you like survivors to know about that support?

Intentionally creating time to discuss how to welcome survivors into services is an important part of advocacy work. As a staff, create an action plan with a reasonable timeline to design your program's own unique resource for survivors. The outcomes of these action plans may look different for each program. As you move forward, continue to actively seek ways to invite survivors in to services.

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