

LESSONS FOR LOCAL PROGRAMS

1. Truly effective and accessible sexual assault services cannot happen if the program does not have an understanding and direct response to racism and oppression.
2. To be truly effective, programs must have a clear organizational identity as a provider of services for survivors of sexual violence. Recognizing both the overlapping and the distinct needs of survivors of sexual and domestic violence is not merely a matter of philosophy. It also has practical implications for how dual/multi-service programs are managed and how they account for their work.
3. Sustainable sexual assault services require explicit and agency-wide support. Policies and procedures (including job descriptions, agency forms, etc.) make sexual assault services more integral to the organization's work, ensures that all staff has clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the sexual assault program, and supports trauma-informed work.
4. Stable and empowering leadership is fundamental to successful organizational change. Stable and empowering leadership requires using direct, open, and transparent communication.
5. Programs must attend to the well-being of their staff and of the organization as a whole. The extent to which programs support their own staff was seen as directly influencing the quality of services that could be provided to survivors.
6. Programs need to prioritize in-depth foundational and on-going sexual assault specific training. Sexual assault specific training should integrate trauma-informed and anti-oppression frameworks to address the unique and multi-faceted needs of survivors of sexual violence. Sexual assault training also needs to prioritize advocacy skills based on active listening, empathy, building rapport, empowerment, and collaboration.
7. Programs need to offer services that meet the needs of survivors of sexual violence. When programs lack a foundational understanding of sexual assault trauma and advocacy – as well as policies in place to support sexual assault services – they tend to gear their services to the tangible services addressing the immediate physical needs of the survivors they serve. But beyond these crisis-focused needs there are diverse and wide-ranging needs and experiences of sexual assault survivors. In order to provide comprehensive services to survivors, programs must address the entire scope of survivors' experiences and the range of needs that exist beyond immediate crisis response. When rooted in anti-oppression and empowerment-based frameworks, programs are responsive to the multidimensional needs of survivors, employ the belief that survivors are the best experts on their own experiences, and address the physical, social, emotional, and spiritual needs of sexual assault survivors, their families, and allies.
8. Strong programs embrace change and growth. Enhancing sexual assault services in dual/multi-service programs requires that programs acknowledge that sexual assault survivors are not getting what they deserve. It requires openness to more radical changes than making tweaks to existing programs. Programs must bravely engage in an honest and critical self-assessment that includes reflection on whether, as an organization, they are ready to say, "We don't know what we don't know" and to accept feedback in all areas, including those where they thought they were doing well.