

Best Practices for Community Based Advocates

Use of an Empowerment Philosophy

Advocates do not encourage or discourage victims from reporting or participating in the criminal justice system. An advocate assists victims in making informed choices. The victims' choices and needs determine how the advocate proceeds. It is important to remember that an advocate may be responding to a victim regardless of whether other systems are accessed.

24-Hour Response

Advocacy should be available 24 hours a day/365 days a year both on a crisis line and in person. Since victims may enter the system in a variety of ways, either by contacting a 24-hour hotline, through an Emergency Room or by contacting Law Enforcement, it is imperative that the initial responder contact advocacy immediately.

24-hour Advocacy Hotlines: A 24-hour hotline should be answered by a live, trained person and should offer referral, information, support and access to round the clock in-person advocacy. The 24-hour hotline should also have multi-lingual and accessible capabilities determined by the makeup of the community. This includes devices for the Deaf community and to those who are hard of hearing, including translators, etc.

The following is a list of items a hotline advocate may ask or do during a call from a victim. The list is not exhaustive and can be determined by the advocacy agency.

- Ask for a call back number in case of a hang up.
- Assess the victim's safety and emergency/medical needs.
- Inform the victim of their options and provide information about how to preserve evidence.
- Dispatch an in person advocate and transfer information.

Use of Community Based Advocates

The most independent advocacy service – community based advocacy - should have someone available and accessible at all times. It is considered best practice to utilize community based advocates in responding to sexual assault.

Team Advocacy

Best practice standards recommend having two advocates available to ensure appropriate support will be available for victims and their allies. One advocate should be a community based advocate. A second advocate may be a “system based,” such as an employee of a prosecution office, a police department, or a health care provider. Availability of both types of advocates ensures a collaborative system response.

Vertical Advocacy

It is considered best practice for the victim to have the same advocate throughout the reporting process. Further advocacy can be determined through a comprehensive case management plan.

Advocate Availability and Access

Community-based advocates should be available to meet with victims at the hospital, law enforcement agency, or as determined by community protocol. At the victim's request, community-based advocates should be accessible to victims and allowed in law enforcement interviews, SANE exam rooms, prosecution meetings—everywhere the victim touches through the system.

Cultural Competency/Diversity

It is best practice for community-based advocacy agencies to have a staff of advocates that represents the population the agency is serving. It is also best practice for agencies to have thoughtful, intentional and continuous training and discussion on cultural diversity, and how oppression, racism, ageism, audism, and other forms of discrimination impact the lives of victims and create unique barriers to reporting and prosecuting sexual assault crimes.

Victims with Special Needs

It is best practice for community –based advocacy agencies to have a staff person who is experienced in working with adult sexual assault victims with special needs. For example, an adult who is developmentally, mentally disabled or autistic will potentially need a different type and/or amount of advocacy after experiencing a sexual assault. It is important for the community-based advocate to assist in helping to educate the other SART members about working with a sexual assault victim with special needs if the victim decides to access the criminal justice system.

Case Management

Advocacy is an essential part of the service provision process and it is important (with permission from the victim) that law enforcement, SANE and district attorneys keep advocates informed about the progress of a sexual assault investigation. While the primary role of a community-based advocate is to support the victim, advocates can be strong allies to other SART members by providing needed case management services for victims. Advocates can support victims who decide to report a sexual assault by removing barriers inhibiting a victim from being involved in the criminal justice process, and link victims to available community services that support healing. All of these case management activities are part of a victim-centered response and support a good outcome for the victim and the system.

Record Keeping

Community-based advocacy agencies are responsible to keep records for funding purposes. Advocacy agencies should have a protocol about what information is kept, how privacy and confidentiality is maintained, and under what conditions information is released and how information is released.

Wisconsin Adult Sexual Assault Response Team Protocol (pp. 14-16) by Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault, 2011. Retrieved from https://www.wcasa.org/file_open.php?id=203
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