ROLE OF ADVOCATES

THOUGHTS OF AN ADVOCATE

I was so busy today. We had a couple of women and their children who came to the shelter today badly in need of safety and help.

I hurried about after hearing their stories and doing intake to help meet some of their basic human needs such as food, a bed and personal essentials. They came here in a hurry with basically nothing but the clothes on their backs. Between doing this and answering the phone, my mind was in a whirl and I was feeling angry and frustrated. I was angry at the system. Angry at the police, angry at the Courts and angry at the abusers who caused such pain for these women.

Feeling overwhelmed and tired I finally sat down to catch my breath. I looked up and there sat my sisters at the dining room table feeding their children. Visible bruises, cuts and bite marks on their faces, legs, and arms inflicted by their partners, the father of their children. I stared and stared at them. Yes, here sat our women feeding our sacred babies.

As I stared and what I began to see brought a lump to my throat and made it hard to swallow as the tears welled in my eyes. What I began to feel in the room was so strong that I could almost see them. It wasn't just the visible bruises and cuts. What I saw was the tattered, bruised, torn spirits of my sisters. Here was the reality. This is what I'll never forget. We can go to workshops, conferences; meetings to discuss the whys, should'ves, could'ves of the battered women and the batterer. But this is the reality. Here were my sisters, my daughters, my nieces, my granddaughters, my auntie, my mother. And yes, she was still going on tending her children. Wow! What strength! What Courage! What perseverance our Lakota women have. Now tell me, who is the real Lakota warrior? I honor them and I respect them… my sisters. This is why I am here. To help, to persevere, to use my frustrations and anger to help make a difference so we don't have to live like this anymore.

By Gloria Cournoyer, Oglala Lakota, Shelter Coordinator, Cangleska, Inc.

In Brief: Advocate's Role from an Indigenous Perspective – 2020

NOTE: *Up to 96% of victims/survivors of battering/IPV are female, so the words "woman", "women," "she" and "her" are used in this document. However, male victims/survivors, those who are LBGTQ2S, those who are differently-abled, and other Relatives from disenfranchised groups also have a right to advocacy and resources in ways that meet their needs. Advocacy includes addressing challenges and barriers posed by sexism, heterosexism, classism, racism and other forms of oppression.*

Context:
The passage of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (VAWA) has resulted in the institutionalization of advocacy. This, in turn, has shifted the definition of advocacy from a grassroots, pro-active, social change framework, to a definition framed by a social work perspective – advocates as service providers. Here the definition of advocate is based upon its original grassroots, activist foundation created largely by women survivors of battering and sexual violence. Their vision and work created the U.S. domestic violence shelter movement, initiated many policy and legislative changes, including mandatory arrest laws and the VAWA itself.

Historical perspective is important. Briefly, beginning in the 1970's the shelter movement in the US, was modelled after efforts of women in England. Women who were battered opened their doors to other women who were battered – women helping women. Shelters were women's homes and church basements. They survived on donations, bake sales and the like. Identifying as an "advocate" usually meant you were a survivor of battering and/or sexual violence. The personal experience of being battered was motivation and integral expertise for the majority of advocates. The Family Violence Prevention and Services Act in 1984 provided the initial federal funding for shelters, though donations and local fund-raising were, and in many instances still are, necessary to keep shelter doors open. The VAWA made significant changes in resources for advocacy and shelters. However, domestic violence shelters, especially in Indian Country and rural areas, remain scarce. Grassroots advocates/ survivors, and their allies, can be credited for bringing domestic violence and intimate partner violence (i.e. battering) as central to violence against women, out of the shadows and making violence against women a national, criminal justice and human rights issue. It opened the door to addressing other issues of oppression, including violence within and against the LGBTQ2S communities, women of color and indigenous women. Child survivors of domestic violence and male survivors continue to be important aspects of this movement. As resources increased and public awareness evolved, the capacity to be inclusive of diverse populations, like the LGBTQ2S communities and those with disabilities, has expanded. This reflects the power of advocates as agents for social change to end domestic and sexual violence, and oppression.

Leadership of Native Women
Native/Indigenous women were not always at the table of the women's or shelter movements for a variety of historical and societal reasons. However, over the years, the leadership, expertise and tenacity of Native women advocates established a permanent place at the table. Note within VAWA the creation of tribal set-asides, and Title IX – Safety for Native Women in the 2005 reauthorization. It's important to acknowledge that initially VAWA 1994, created a number of national resource centers, though not a Native specific resource center. Native advocates had worked side-by-side with non-Native advocates in the creation of VAWA, developing relationships and their understanding of sovereignty, and jurisdictional, cultural and historical realities of Indian Country. These non-native women/allies recognized their limitations and the dire need for a Native specific resource center, held themselves accountable by advocating for the center and gave up some of *their own funding* in the first year to make it happen. This is a rare, powerful, historic example of women working together as sisters, moving beyond politics and turf issues, relating as women, to ensure everyone's need are met. As a result, Sacred Circle, National Resource Center to Violence Against Native Women opened in 1998, eventually becoming the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center in 2010.

Cultural Context of the Role of Advocate

Previous to colonization, violence against Native women and children was an extremely rare occurrence. This is true of violence against elders and those who were LGBTQ2S as well. Such violence was considered unnatural and was an affront to the entire Nation. The vast majority of indigenous cultures held women and children as sacred. Indigenous cultures are based upon a spiritual understanding that all living beings are related and interdependent, and that every individual has their own unique path and purpose. Values of respect, generosity, courage, non-violence, compassion and humility are ingrained in indigenous belief systems and life ways. These concepts form the foundation for advocacy in Indian Country. Ending domestic and sexual violence, intimate partner violence/battering, in Indian Country rests on the honoring of tribal sovereignty, and the reclamation of traditional life ways, and roles and responsibilities as Relatives. Our relationships were not based upon titles, job descriptions and status, but on how we are connected as Relatives, and our roles within families, societies and clans. The challenge is to confront oppression, decolonize, undoing internalized oppression and embrace our roles as Relatives. How we relate to each other and show respect begins with how we call each other, i.e. Sister, Aunt, Mother, Brother, Uncle, Father etc. Reconnecting as Relatives is imperative in ending violence and transforming our communities.

Advocacy

An advocate is the biased supporter of women and other survivors who have been battered/raped. This is a unique role, because it's the only job where priorities and focus are entirely about the comprehensive safety of victims and survivors, and offender accountability, ideally, as defined by the survivor. The goal of advocacy is to help ensure women's and other survivor's safety and personal sovereignty, as well as offender accountability. Gender-based violence and oppression are about power * and control. Victims of violence have had power and control taken from them. Advocates helps equalize this imbalance. Within Indian Country, advocacy is based on the understanding that violence against Native women is a result of colonization and oppression, and that ending violence requires reclaiming indigenous natural, indigenous life ways and belief systems. Advocacy is personal, political and cultural. It is about individuals, and connections between groups and society as a whole.

Grassroots, culturally- and woman-centered advocates are unlike service providers who act within western-based institutions that require proof of need, eligibility, provide limited access, time and resources, and are accountable to the system they work within. Though restrictions may be imposed by funders and inadequate resources, advocates address all forms of gender-based violence, and the intersections of mental health and substance abuse issues, poverty, classism, sexism, heterosexism, racism, historical and intergenerational trauma. These intersections are born of the same root causes, overlap with, and intensify the violence and tactics of intimate partner violence/battering and sexual violence. Advocates believe survivors are the experts on their lives and needs, and have the right to determine what they need, when and how. Getting safe and healing require time and the path to safety follows unique individual paths. The strengths, courage, expertise and leadership of survivors is integral to empowering advocacy and social change. At the end of the day, advocates are accountable to women and other survivors. It's about connections and our relationships as relatives.

The job description of an advocate is comprehensive. It involves pro-actively assisting and supporting women and their children, and other survivors: making relationships, listening to and believing survivors, accompaniment to court, providing necessities and resources, transportation, housing assistance, providing legal, medical and other systems advocacy – the possibilities are determined by the survivor.

Beyond individual advocacy, outside shelter doors, advocates work to transform society, so every space is a safe space. This means providing active leadership in community education, systems change including policy development and education, coordinated community response efforts assuring prioritization of safety and offender accountability in all matters, and that responses are effective, respectful and trauma-informed. Advocacy involves ally-building, policy-making, legislative changes and development of resources, like housing. It also means acting as social change agents by pro-actively confronting root causes of violence and reclaiming cultural belief systems that create non-violent societies, and actively honor the sacred status of women.

THE ROLE OF ADVOCATES

Adapted by NIWRC from materials by Sacred Circle, National Resource Center to End Violence Against Native Women with credit to "Advocacy" by Anne Marshall and Ellen Pence

- To advocate for the woman who is battered in a manner that respects and validates her individuality, experiences, decisions and strengths. [To advocate for disenfranchised, LGBTQ2S and cisgender male survivors in the same manner.]

- To model courage and resistance in the face of oppression, intimidation and fear.

- To provide leadership and ensure that women's/survivor's safety is a priority in the coordinated community response initiative that promotes and enhances the spiritual and cultural traditions of the sacredness of women and children.

- To advocate for the expressed interests and safety of survivors, and their children, including provision of safe space and any other resources necessary for the woman/survivor to regain control of her life.

- To focus attention on the operational meaning of safety and integrity of women and renewal of traditional life ways as guiding principles at all levels of the justice, law enforcement, social and medical systems dealing with domestic violence cases.

- To provide expertise based on the experience of women/survivors who are battered and their children on issues related to domestic violence within the justice, law enforcement, social and medical systems.

- To ensure that all who have been battered/sexually assaulted have 24-hour access to support, accurate information, crisis intervention, and other advocacy services.

- To educate personnel within the relevant systems regarding the most effective responses to domestic violence on behalf of batterers, victims and at-risk family members, prioritizing victim safety and offender accountability.

- To be conscious of the educational role within all advocate activities.

- To remain accountable to the woman/ survivor who has been battered/raped, including maintaining confidentiality.

* "Power and control" commonly describe the goal of the purposeful system of tactics battering/intimate partner violence. However, the meaning and use of "power" in this context is a reflection of a societal and cultural cause of violence. In American society, people with power are seen as those with the capacity to be violent, i.e. cause harm, manipulate others against their will, set and enforce rules for their own benefit, provide/withdraw resources etc. The male stereotype or expectations for men in America is that "real men" are powerful. When power is defined as the ability to be violent, then the result is gender-based violence. However, within indigenous societies, "power" has the opposite meaning. Powerful people within indigenous societies are those with the capacity to give Life, preserve Life and nurture life, i.e. women, medicine people, Elders, men who support and protect women, children, Elders and those in need.

THE ROLE OF ADVOCATES

- To advocate for the woman who is battered in a manner that respects and validates her individuality, experiences, decisions and strengths. To advocate for LGBTQ2S and cisgender male survivors in the same manner.

- To model courage and resistance in the face of oppression, intimidation and fear.

- To provide leadership and ensure that women's/survivor's safety is a priority in the coordinated community response initiative that promotes and enhances the spiritual and cultural traditions of the sacredness of women and children.

- To advocate for the expressed interests and safety of survivors, and their children, including provision of safe space and any other resources necessary for the woman/survivor to regain control of her life.

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- To be conscious of the educational role within all advocate activities.

- To remain accountable to the woman/ survivor who has been battered, including maintaining confidentiality.

NOTE: Up to 96% of victims/survivors of battering are female, so the *words woman, women, she* and *her* are used in these documents. However, men who are victims of battering should receive the same kinds of advocacy and resources in ways that meet their needs. Additionally, victims/survivors who are LBGTQ2S also have the right to advocacy and resources that address challenges and barriers posed by heterosexism.

Produced by Sacred Circle; adapted from "Advocacy" by Anne Marshall and Ellen Pence

ADVOCATES DO...

- Advocate for the personal sovereignty and safety of women and their children, including provision of safe space and any resources necessary for women/survivors to regain control of their lives.
- Ask, listen to, believe and respectfully act on what survivors state they need and want in a trauma-informed, culturally appropriate way.
- Clearly and persistently send the message: violence is unacceptable, battering is a crime and never the fault of the woman who has been battered, or other survivors.
- Validate the individuality, experiences, decisions and strengths of women and other survivors who have been battered.
- Act and treat women who are battered, all survivors, as relatives.
- Model courage and resistance in the face of oppression, intimidation and fear.
- Provide leadership ensuring women's safety is a priority in coordinated community responses that promote and enhance the spiritual and cultural traditions of the sacredness of women & children.
- Focus attention on the intent of safety and integrity of women & renewal of traditional life ways as guiding principles throughout systems dealing with violence against women and other oppressed groups.
- Provide expertise through the voices of women who are battered and their children, other survivors on issues regarding violence against women within justice, law enforcement, social & medical systems.
- Ensure all who have been battered/ sexually assaulted have 24-hour access to support, accurate information, crisis intervention and other advocacy.
- Educate personnel within systems about the most effective responses to violence regarding batterers, victims and at-risk family members, prioritizing victim safety and offender accountability.
- Be conscious of the educational role within all advocate activities.
- Remain accountable to the woman/survivor who has been battered/sexually assaulted including maintaining confidentiality.

ADVOCATES ***DO NOT***...

- Act without the expressed informed consent or participation of the woman who has been battered or withhold or create barriers to safety & resources because we judged her "unworthy" in some way.
- Believe we should mind-read what she needs or wants, or assume we know better than she does.
- Minimize or blame her for the violence, collude/make excuses for the batterer's behavior, or treat the violence as a private or mental health issue.
- Treat all women the same, as incapable of making decisions, "sick" or incompetent.
- Label or act as if women/survivors who are battered are "cases," "those women," clients or patients.
- Get women/survivors to cooperate with other agencies or "follow rules" not honoring her safety or sovereignty.
- Allow task forces, meetings or initiatives to focus on the behavior of women/survivor, instead of accountability of offenders and of systems.
- Diverting attention to mental health or other issues not directly related to battering as violent crime, safety and Native women's sovereignty, or that reinforce external or internal oppression.
- Speak for or on behalf of battered women, unless they are not safe enough to do so themselves, or without their express, informed permission.
- Ignore or create barriers that prevent or limit access to safety or resources, including substance use or trauma reactions.
- Forget violence ends through social change that includes systems work focused on accountability for provision of safety and offender accountability.
- Dismiss the reality that conflicts, and creation of working relationships are "teachable moments" for all involved, including advocates.
- Allow limited budgets, policy, funders or our "check signers" to compromise advocating for the safety and sovereignty of women/survivors who have been battered.

NOTE: Up to 96% of survivors of battering are female, so the *words woman, women, she* and *her* are used in these documents. Men who are victims of battering should receive the same kinds of advocacy and resources in ways that meet their needs. Survivors who are LBGTQ2S also have the right to advocacy and resources that address challenges and barriers posed by heterosexism.

Sacred Circle, Nat'l Resource Ctr. To End Violence Against Native Women

TRAITS (Of an effective advocate)

Cangleska, Inc. Advocates Training Manual*

Empathy

Empathy means to understand what a woman is saying and communicating back to her that you do understand. It doesn't mean that the advocate had to have the same experience. It does mean that the advocate has learned about the dynamics of battering or rape and she can genuinely identify with the woman's experience.

Respect

The advocate knows the woman has worth. The advocate protects the woman's right to make her own decisions. She knows the woman has the ability to overcome the crisis. Being respectful means that the advocate doesn't get over- protective or doesn't act in a negative way toward the woman. Battered women and rape victims come with many different personalities and some are hard to work with. Remembering she has worth and rights will help.

Genuineness

The advocate doesn't need to become someone she isn't. She doesn't use "counselor talk" or psycho-babble. She uses her own style and is confident in that. The advocate can be freely herself. When an advocate is genuine, the woman develops trust quickly and doesn't have to be on guard that she's being psychoanalyzed or judged by someone who thinks they are superior.

Concreteness

The advocate is clear, concise and specific. This helps the woman move out of confusion and powerlessness. It also helps her stay in the present - in what's going on now. For example, if the woman says, "He hit me." The advocate asks, "Where did he hit you, with what and how many times?"

Sensitivity to "others"

How a woman reacts to being physically or sexually attacked has a lot to do with her specific culture, family, handicap or lifestyle. Advocates have to work hard or rid themselves of stereotypes. For example: a woman may tell you she is in a love relationship with another woman. If she perceives that the advocate disapproves of lesbians, she knows she won't get help and the advocate hasn't done her job.

Self-Disclosure

Sometimes it's helpful for the advocate to share personal details about her life - most often if she has been a victim of violence herself. There are benefits and negatives to doing this. They have to be weighed by the advocate and she has to go with her instinct. The benefits are that there can be a bonding and a positive relationship established. The negative is that the focus could shift away from the woman who needs your help. The most common mistake is when the advocate goes on too long about her own experience and the woman feels like she has to become the helper.

Confidence

Confidence comes with experience and training. It means the advocate is convincing and dynamic - she is sure of herself. This helps the woman feel like she can trust and she's in a safe place. Also, it communicates to the woman that there is hope that the advocate will use her skills to help the woman find her way out of crisis. Sometimes, we have to convince ourselves we are confident even when we aren't. One of the mistakes an advocate can make is to "get into the crisis" with the caller. Remembering that she is asking you for assistance will help to keep calm.

**Cangleska, Inc. was a Native non-profit model advocacy program that included shelter, outreach, batterers re-education and probation programs, etc. As a culturally-based program it modelled itself in the ways of a women's society. Additionally, understanding that battering is a gender-based issue, the word "woman" is used rather than survivor or victim. Inclusion of males, recognition of the Two Spirit community, children etc. was considered a routine, necessary part of advocacy.*

How to Provide Women/Survivor Safety & Batterer Accountability

When the Batterer Uses the Tactic of …

Physical / Sexual Assault:
• Provide safe space and confidential medical care
• Have the batterer arrested, prosecuted and sentenced to the full extent of the law
• Provide easy access to protection and restraining orders, ensuring enforcement
• Assess for possible threats from his family or friends
• Acknowledge the pain and sense of betrayal that comes from victimization
• Assist and talk with women from a place of compassion and validate her strengths

Male Privilege:
• Act in a way that validates the sacredness of women
• Express the right of women to move through the world with respect and compassion
• Avoid collusion - confront the batterer's belief about his right to control his partner
• Respectfully confront him about his behavior
• Actively support women's expertise about themselves and their expressed needs

Isolation:
• Provide respectful support and assistance to women
• Provide outreach and easy access to services, including transportation, childcare, etc.
• Remove any barriers to her regaining power and control over her life
• Deal directly and immediately with on-going threats of violence
• Create and enforce sanctions for interfering with her moving freely and without fear

Intimidation:
• Allow advocates to accompany her
• Shield her from this tactic, being aware that it includes looks or gestures from him, his relatives or friends
• Avoid use of position as an authority figure to reinforce intimidation tactics
• Communicate clearly that intimidation is unacceptable by naming the behavior and enforcing consequences

Emotional Abuse:
• Treat and name women as relatives, not as "cases" or other objectifying labels
• Do not make her justify her actions or requests for assistance or resources
• Validate her thoughts, feelings, actions and decisions
• Provide accurate information that lets her know the violence is never her fault, she did not cause and cannot alone stop his violence
• See and speak to the best in her
• Support her healing in her own way
• Speak with her as a friend, honestly and respectfully

Minimizing, Lying and Blaming:
• Avoid collusion with the batterer by buying into his stories or manipulation of systems to maintain control of his partner
• Believe in her and what she says
• Understand the dynamics of battering to avoid minimizing or blaming her/victim for batterer's behavior
• Focus on the truth and confront batterer about his dishonesty
• Find ways to hold the batterer accountable and change behavior.

Abusing the Children:
• Act in ways that reflects the understanding that mother abuse is child abuse
• Understand that if we protect women, they can protect their children
• Do not allow the batterer to use children as weapons or means of access for violence against their mother through custody or visitation
• Provide the safety and resources for the mother (non-offending parent) and children to stay together
• Know that removing children from their mother for "failure to protect" revictimizes children and mothers
• Create laws that asserts that battering is child abuse

Economic Abuse:
• Provide free, easily accessible resources and services
• Acknowledge that poverty, especially lack of housing, causes women and their children, and other survivors, to return to the batterer or be homeless
• Create appropriate resources without barriers

Coercion and Threats:
• Create safety and comfort for women (and other survivors) to express themselves and do things freely
• Know that his past use of violence may continue to affect her
• Affirm her thoughts, feelings and opinions
• Understand that using position and authority to make her do what you want her to do is disrespectful and abusive
• Create and enforce laws that validate her rights and hold the batterer accountable for his violence

Cultural Abuse:
• Provide support and accurate information
• Understand our role as relatives to all things in Creation
• Be responsible for our role as Relatives by holding ourselves accountable to women who has been victimized, children and other Relatives
• Respect her Path as being equally important as our own
• Honor her privacy without it being an excuse for inaction

Ritual Abuse:
• Validate her/his fears and concerns
• Provide accurate information
• Provide whatever she/he needs to practice her spiritual ways
• Practice our spirituality so our relationship with our Relatives reflects humility and self-understanding

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