

# LESSONS ON SERVING MALE SURVIVORS THROUGH SEXUAL ASSAULT SERVICES PROGRAM



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# LESSONS ON SERVING MALE SURVIVORS THROUGH SEXUAL ASSAULT SERVICES PROGRAM (SASP)

To learn more about best practices for working with male survivors of sexual assault, the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) reviewed the Sexual Assault Services Program (SASP) Formula Grant 2017 Victim Services Data from the Violence Against Women Act Measuring Effectiveness Initiative (VAWA MEI) (Violence Against Women Act Measuring Effectiveness Initiative [VAWMEI], n.d.).

The SASP Formula Grant Program funds sexual assault programs and other organizations to provide services to sexual assault survivors. It's the first and only federal funding stream solely dedicated to direct intervention and related assistance for sexual assault survivors. We were interested in learning how programs used this funding to provide services to men.

To satisfy the reporting requirements of VAWA 2000, a report must be submitted to Congress every two years demonstrating the effectiveness of VAWA funding. VAWA MEI was established to help the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) document and measure the effectiveness of VAWA grant programs and satisfy the reporting requirements of VAWA. To learn more about the VAWA MEI and the SASP grant program, visit [www.vawamei.org](http://www.vawamei.org).

For more information on SASP, see the Sexual Assault Services Program FAQ at <http://nsvrc.co/SASPFAQ>.

Nearly a quarter of all men in the U.S. have experienced sexual violence involving physical contact in their lifetime, according to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (Smith et al., 2018). However, of victims whose gender was known, only 10.9% of victims served through the SASP program in 2017 identified as male (VAWMEI, n.d.).

For more information on why male survivors may not seek services at rape crisis centers, see the Male Victims section of NSVRC's "SART Toolkit" available at <http://nsvrc.co/MaleVictims>.

To learn more about how programs provide services to men, we identified several programs that reported higher-than-average rates of male survivors served with this funding stream. Out of these programs, we then identified centers that mostly served adults. Finally, we identified centers with differing service areas based on other reported demographic information including race, disability, and immigration status.

We then interviewed several centers from this list to learn what they have done to reach and serve male survivors in their communities. Out of these interviews, the following themes emerged.

## An open-minded approach, with willingness to change

Programs that served higher-than-average percentages of adult male survivors demonstrated an open-minded approach to their work, and a desire to change in order to serve more survivors. These programs took notice when men were not seeking their services, and reflected on what they could do differently to change that.

One program specifically mentioned receiving a lot of training from their state coalition, and in turn offering training to their staff and volunteers about working with male survivors.

"It starts with being vulnerable, saying 'I don't know we're doing the best job that we could, and let's just own that' and just start to be better, have some humility here"

(C. Johnson, personal communication, February 24, 2020).

## A focus on gender-inclusive language and reaching LGBTQ communities

Programs mentioned that they used gender-neutral language in documents that referenced their audience, including in policies and on intake forms. One program gave an example of this change in their external communication, too: When another organization asks them to talk about their services for women and children, they make sure to point out that they serve everyone.

"So when we said we need to be very humble and purposeful, and we asked our local pride collective to walk through the building and give us some feedback on what it feels like, review our policies, intake paperwork, give us recommendations, and we implemented every single recommendation they had"

(C. Johnson, personal communication, February 24, 2020).

Multiple programs cited hanging up “All Are Welcome” signage and other visible markers of inclusion. Many of these changes came as a result of trying to reach LGBTQ survivors.

Find All Are Welcome signs on NSVRC’s website at [www.nsvrc.org/all-are-welcome](http://www.nsvrc.org/all-are-welcome).

## Including information on sexual victimization of men in presentations

Programs mentioned that they do regular presentations in their community on various topics related to sexual assault. They believe that addressing how men experience sexual violence in these presentations ultimately led to more men seeking their services.

These presentations helped frame sexual assault as something that impacts everyone regardless of gender. The presentations also gave the program a chance to build a reputation as a place where men can go to seek healing from sexual trauma.

“When going out into the community, we present our services and let the audience know that they are available for any survivor residing in our community that is over the age of 13 regardless of gender, ability to pay, etc.”

(S. Aitchinson, personal communication, February 28, 2020).

## Outreach to male survivors specifically

Many programs do outreach to men as bystanders to prevent sexual assault and harassment, and outreach to men as allies or loved ones to survivors. Programs that serve a higher percentage of men went beyond these forms of outreach and referenced different ways that they try to directly reach male survivors in the communities they serve.

Outreach to male survivors will look different in every community. What may work for one community may not work for another. For outreach to be effective, it must be relevant to members of your community.

Interviewees used a number of strategies to reach men in their communities, including:

- Sharing social media posts and graphics focused specifically on sexual victimization of men
- Giving away specific items for men like hunting gear, hats, etc.
- Supporting men in the community who want to speak publicly about their survivorship
- Having men on their staff



- Changing the organization or program name away from something gender-specific to something more gender-inclusive
- Including men in print materials such as brochures and images within the organization to indicate all survivors are served

“Men have been courageous enough to go on the news and talk about their experience and talk about what they got from our centers so that has helped get that message out there”

(C. Johnson, personal communication, February 24, 2020).

Remember that it is important to talk to the members of your community and test different approaches out to determine what would work best for your community. This is an ongoing process and is not something you check off a list. As you try new things, you will learn to grow and change your approach to reaching men.

For more information on how to conduct a community assessment see NSVRC's "*Listening to Our Communities: Assessment Toolkit*" available at <http://nsvrc.co/AssessmentToolkit>.

## Developing strong community partnerships

Programs mentioned that they believed stigma led men to be more likely to disclose in private settings like individual therapy or the program's hotline. A consistent strategy they used was to reach men in part by making sure mental health professionals in their community (including those who work at local clinics, schools, and correctional facilities) are aware that the sexual assault program offers free resources to survivors. This equipped the mental health professionals to provide referrals to any men that may disclose experiences of sexual abuse.

Another strategy programs use is having staff go where men in their community are living, including men's homeless shelters and detention facilities. (Programs should think about other places in their own communities where they might reach men, including father's groups, drug treatment facilities, LGBTQ centers, and more.)

“We make sure mental health professionals are aware that we are a free resource to refer any individual who has experienced sexual abuse or assault”

(M. DeFalco, personal communication, February 27, 2020).

Programs also mentioned that networking and educating community partners has led to men being referred. One of the programs is part of a larger organization that provides behavioral health services, and noted that the referrals that come from other places within that umbrella have been effective.

## Long-term investment in reaching male survivors

Programs consistently referred to their long-term commitment to reaching and serving male survivors. They didn't reference one singular outreach activity that held the key to reaching men. Instead, they committed over a long period of time to understanding the issues and shifting their strategies.

They institutionalized certain aspects of this by doing things like:

- including reaching male survivors in a strategic plan,
- including male survivors in their elevator pitch,
- and designing support groups that include male survivors.

“We’ve worked hard over the past 15 years to dispel the notion that our services are only for women”

(S. Kaiser, personal communication, February 20, 2020).

One program cited a retired therapist who championed reaching and serving men for many years, and who was a visible and respected figure in the community. Colleagues referred many men to this person because of this reputation and visibility.

### Commitment to ongoing work

Programs serving men did not necessarily think of themselves as having arrived at the end of a goal. Instead, they mentioned the work they still had left to do to improve, and to make sure that colleagues understood the issues faced by male survivors, and that men in their community knew they could seek healing at the program and felt comfortable doing so.

“We have to continue pushing regularly to ensure all understand that men experience this trauma and deserve services”

(S. Kaiser, personal communication, February 20, 2020).

Interviewees cited the larger issues in society that they need to be part of changing in order for men to consider seeking services related to sexual trauma. One program shared that they were surprised to learn they were providing services to men at rates higher than average, and that they continue to talk internally about how they think they aren’t doing enough to reach men.

### Conclusion

Programs that served adult male survivors at comparatively high rates through SASP-funded work shared several common themes. In implementing these common strategies, programs paid attention to their particular context and to the needs of the men in their communities.

Programs looking to reach more male survivors in their communities can:

- Identify the places in your community where men receive other services and connect with those service providers (mental health professionals, drug/alcohol treatment centers, jails/prisons, shelters, etc).
- Ask questions and listen to the needs of the men in your community.
- View reaching survivors who are not yet using your program’s services as a long-term process. Be open and willing to change to address the needs of survivors who are men as this will improve service delivery to all survivors.
- Train new advocates and offer ongoing professional development on working with men.



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