



Economic Empowerment Project

Update

Spring/Summer 2010

Immigrant Survivors and Pre-Employment Skills

By Sanjna Das, Apna Ghar*

Back in Africa, “Hiba” was a proprietor of an on-the-run grocery store. On her head she carried a big basket full of daily essentials to sell at the wayside or village markets. She negotiated prices, retail and wholesale. She attended regular customers and attracted new ones, knowing their preferences and buying power. She managed her family budget while caring for five children as a single mother.

While in India, “Tanu” was her father’s right hand help in his wholesale clothing business. As a teenager, she saw her Mom and older brother work side-by-side with her Dad as the family business grew from home to a supply house. She was naturally drawn into the family business and took pride in being part of the family enterprise. Tanu always kept accounts and was vigilant about the market trend.



All changed for both! Hiba dreamt of a better life for her children, but became a trafficking victim sent to the USA; Tanu became a victim of domestic violence perpetrated by her husband. He was an American citizen and went back home to marry honoring her parents’ wishes for an arranged marriage within the caste. These are a few of the common experiences among most immigrant survivors who Apna Ghar serves. Apna Ghar (a Hindi/Urdu phrase meaning our home) is a social service agency providing emergency shelter and wraparound services to South Asian and immigrant survivors of abuse.

In spite of the inherent skills these women developed and applied in their countries of origin, this new land challenges them as they get ready to work on remaining safe and becoming self sufficient. This requires them to be aware of their rights and responsibilities, be job ready, financially literate and “banked”. In this journey from safety to stability, our case managers assist survivors with developing “pre-employment” skills while they await their legal status to be formalized under VAWA (Violence Against Women Act). These skills comprise the following:

- Proficiency in the dominant language (enrolling in English as Second Language classes), enhancement of social and work place ethics (enrolling in job preparatory trainings, engaging in volunteer opportunities)
- Identifying and recognizing needs and wants, managing money and developing economic assets (Financial Coaching to learn how to track income and expense, how to collaborate with financial institutions to maximize resources and how to access public benefits)
- For immigrant survivors recognizing a need for “pre-employment” skills is to repackage their existing skills as they reenter life on their own in a new land.

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Teens & Financial Abuse

Teenagers are more frequently reporting being victims of financial abuse. Over the coming months, ICADV’s Economic Empowerment Project will be looking at ways to adapt pieces of the financial literacy curriculum for teens. However, until something more formal is available, advocates should consider bringing economic abuse concerns into their outreach and prevention work with teens. In the same ways that teens are given tools to recognize a healthy emotional relationship, it would be helpful to discuss healthy financial relationships too. Many advocates report that teens are often already involved in abusive financial relationships with partners or family and may need a safe space to discuss those experiences.

Many Survivors Need Support with Pre-Employment Skills

In this issue of ICADV’s Economic Empowerment Update, we asked Sanjna Das to discuss her experiences assisting immigrant survivors with “pre-employment” skills. Many of the same concerns and skills are important with non-immigrant survivors as well. Often, women and men in abusive relationships have been deliberately kept out of the workforce by their partners. Beyond basic interview and resume skills, pre-employment skills focus more on the simple interaction of an office environment. On a basic level, this can be addressed through discussing how to collaborate as part of a team, how to react to feedback from supervisors and co-workers, and assessing how much personal information to share with co-workers. Some may even need discussions of the importance of punctuality, appropriate attire at work or who to contact with work-based problems and concerns. For many, these are skills learned as teenagers in their first jobs. For others, these skills never been learned and can make the prospect of entering the workforce even more intimidating.

Assets Illinois IDAs Available

Assets Illinois is a state run program that helps low income people purchase new homes or post-secondary education. Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) match participants savings to help them purchase an asset that helps them reach economic self sufficiency (in this case a home or education). IDAs can be a great resource for survivors who meet the application requirements. Applications are being accepted now! Contact the Economic Empowerment Project for more information.

Advocate Feedback

"I am very proud of a client who recently entered our transitional housing program. It took about six months to start turning the page on the abusive chapter of her life. She wanted to start on the budget section (of the curriculum) and worked the sample budget from her wages as if she were on her own, paying all bills herself. She wanted to see if it will be possible to make it on her own when she completes transitional housing. She was so excited when she came in. She said, 'It will be tight, but I can do this. Once I get out of nurse's aide training and start a higher paying job, it will get easier.' Since then, she has increased her savings and now has an apartment on hold. She has been saving on her own. When she came in for her weekly visit, she proudly announced that she opened a checking account with part of her savings. She discussed it with a personal banker at the bank. They felt she was ready and I do too. She told me she has almost two months rent ready for when she moves."

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Dance for Change, Dance for Joy Donates Money to ICADV's Economic Empowerment Project



On May 8, 2010, seven central Illinois and eastern Missouri dance groups performed in a program which raised \$750 for the Economic Empowerment Project of the ICADV. Performed on the campus of the Lincoln Land Community College in Springfield, all the evening's dances had deep roots in storytelling and women-centered activities. In recognition of women's spirituality, one dance in particular, the healing Fire Dance, was offered to help survivors of domestic violence. Other dances were belly dancing, Gypsy, Bollywood, and traditional Irish dancing. The dances represented Ireland, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey, the Balkans, Gypsy culture from India to Spain, and India. Special guest Pallavi, of India, provided an afternoon workshop in Bollywood dancing, as well as lively performances. The eight groups included the Synergy Rhythm and Dance (Bloomington-Normal), Dance with Me (Springfield), Pava Productions (Peoria), Troupe Zahava (Springfield), Dhoom Taana (St. Louis), Achill Academy of Irish Dance (Springfield), and Lotus Fire (Springfield).

Safety at the Library

The local library is a great resource for survivors; its free internet and resources can be very helpful. And in some cases, researching things on a library computer can be "safer" than doing it on a home computer where an abuser may have installed spyware or reviews browsing history. However, there are safety concerns here as well. This was brought up at an Illinois library where an abuser convinced the local librarian to "confirm" which address was on file for his family at the library. In this case, the abuser cleverly claimed to be coming in to pay off his wife's library fine and wanted to make sure they had the right address on file, but there could be many ways that this kind of information could be accidentally shared. If this is a concern, ask to have a special note put on your account at the library that your personal information should never be shared.



Additional Financial Education for Survivors

This winter, ICADV held four regional trainings of the "Moving Ahead Through Financial Management" financial literacy curriculum. This curriculum, created by the Allstate Foundation and the National Network to End Domestic Violence, is written specifically for survivors of domestic violence to address their unique concerns and situations. Eighty-one advocates representing 71% of ICADV's member programs were trained in the new curriculum, with many using it as an additional resource to their economic advocacy programs. Advocates are encouraged to use the information and tools as best fits the needs of their program: using the entire curriculum, pieces of the curriculum or incorporating this new information into already existing financial literacy. This will give Illinois domestic violence programs more flexibility in how each provides economic advocacy. ICADV is making plans to offer these trainings again in 2011 (specific dates and locations to be determined).

