



ILLINOIS COALITION
AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

One Mission, One Voice

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Summer 2013

PROJECT UPDATE

ICADV Awarded Grant from the Allstate Foundation for Career Advocacy

The Allstate Foundation has awarded ICADV's Economic Empowerment Project the Financial Empowerment Grant for the second year in a row! This grant supports Career Advocacy with survivors at several ICADV local member programs.

In the first year, three ICADV member agencies participated in the program: Apna Ghar, Chicago; Family Shelter Services, Wheaton; Oasis Women's Center, Alton. In the second year, ICADV expanded the project to include five new programs: Mid Central Community Action, Bloomington; The Center for Women in Transition, Champaign; Korean American Women in Need (KANWIN), Chicago; Anna Bixby Women's Center, Harrisburg; Guardian Angel Community Services, Joliet. Additionally, the newly written Career Empowerment Curriculum was introduced by the Allstate Foundation, in conjunction with The National Network to End Domestic Violence and Women Employed, Inc.



Gaining stable employment and independence are some of the most difficult achievements for a domestic violence survivor. An abuser may sabotage a survivor's employment or education, or may not have allowed her to work outside the home. Survivors may have gaps in their resumes that are hard to explain. Years of abuse may have damaged a victim's self-esteem and impacted one's ability to understand the benefits of their experiences, skills and talents. Survivors may still be living in fear of their abusers and need help on seeking employment safely and effectively.

The Career Empowerment Curriculum has five sections intended to work in support groups. Each of the five, two hour sessions cover topics such as: safety, preparing for a career, resume building, and interviewing skills. The curriculum is coupled with "Moving Ahead Through Financial Management", a financial education program also created specifically for survivors of domestic violence. The two together will give survivors the skills and information they need to begin a life of safety and self-sufficiency.

As part of the program, each of the eight sub-grantees was encouraged to adapt the Career Club to best meet the needs of its agency and the survivors they serve. In the first year of the program, ICADV learned the great value of a support group focused solely on employment and economic empowerment. Additionally it was understood that the construction of this group would look differently throughout the state. Each program worked with the Director of Economic Empowerment to structure the support groups, find incentives that would best benefit their clients, and ensure that survivors were getting the skills and information needed to obtain and maintain sustainable employment.

The grant program will not be completed until this fall, but mid-year all eight of the programs reported success. At least 30% of survivors who have participated in the Career Club, thus far, have reported new or better employment. The feedback from attendees has been positive, with one reporting:

"What has the <Career> Empowerment Group done for me? It has shown me how to make choices that benefit me... It has shown me how to manage my money better. It has shown me how to fill out a resume accurately and the proper way to dress for whatever interview I would go on. Group has taught me so much about myself. I know if I put my mind to do something, I can accomplish anything. The group has taught me how to respect myself, and to know that I am somebody."

The additions and adaptations that each program made has enhanced the project. Once completed, these ideas will be compiled and shared with other ICADV member programs interested in implementing Career Club. For example, Oasis Women's Center and Family Shelter Services included more individual time for clients to job search with the assistance of the facilitator. Guardian Angel Community Services created a "Career Closet" where any client with an interview can choose an outfit, shoes, purse, accessories and a goody bag. Apna Ghar created an additional evening networking session for clients outside of Career Club where guest speakers are invited to come and talk about their work. KANWIN translated and reorganized the curriculum to better fit the needs of its mostly Korean Immigrant clients. Mid Central Community Action put together a "Career Team" of advocates, each specializing in a different portion of the curriculum. Several agencies created additional activities for group settings to engage clients and make the work more fun. Career Club has become an important resource for many programs and ICADV looks forward to continued success of this program in the future.

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New Coordinated Assessment of Homeless Services Could Affect Domestic Violence Agencies

One provision of the HEARTH (Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing) Act passed by Congress, is the implementation of a Coordinated Assessment among homeless providers.

The Act defines this Assessment as "a process designed to coordinate program participant intake, assessment and provision referrals" and is in part intended to prevent the "calling around" that many clients have to do looking for services. Ideally, someone seeking shelter services will be easily referred to an agency that best meets his or her needs.

The Coordinated Assessment can be a central location, hotline, intake process, or a combination of the above. These will be created and implemented by local Continuums of Care. There are local Continuums of Care throughout Illinois and each has the ability to implement this new system as they think will work best for their region. Domestic violence programs and victims seeking services interact with the homeless provider network each day and this coordinated assessment will impact them. Domestic Violence Programs and Advocates are encouraged to become involved in their Continuums of Care and this process.

ICADV Hosts Career Advocacy Trainings

Last fall, ICADV hosted three trainings of the newly created Career Empowerment Curriculum. This curriculum, written by the Allstate Foundation, the National Network to End Domestic Violence, and Women Employed, Inc., is a great tool for advocates to increase the confidence and skill levels of survivors in need of stable employment.



75 advocates from 32 domestic violence programs throughout Illinois attended one of these day long trainings. The training was highly rated, with advocates feeling that the techniques in the curriculum would add to the work they currently do. One advocate said that the curriculum would help her "assist survivors in feeling empowered during the job search process, help them set career goals for themselves, and to help me effectively set them in the right direction." Another said that "this will be good to assist survivors in seeking and securing

employment, resume writing, how to handle tricky interviews, networking, creating goals and getting them on the right career path."

Through a grant from the Allstate Foundation's Financial Empowerment Project, ICADV was able to provide this training to advocates as well as pilot the curriculum with eight member domestic violence agencies.

Reverse Budgeting: An Important Tool for Economic Advocacy

Creating an effective budget is an important strategy when assisting a survivor of domestic violence seeking economic independence. Budgeting alone cannot solve someone's financial situation, but it can become an effective tool that works with a person and her goals. Many survivors have not had control over their finances in many years or may have had bad experiences with budgets in the past.

They may feel budgets do not work for them or have experienced shame or despair when trying to make ends meet. Too often, people are told that if they would just budget their finances better they would be meet their expenses, but sometimes there are simply not enough resources to meet the needs.

ICADV began the Economic Empowerment Project in 2007 with the introduction of the Realizing your Economic Action Plan (REAP) Curriculum. Currently, ICADV supports both the REAP Curriculum as well as the Allstate Foundation's Moving Ahead Through Financial Education Curriculum - with some programs using one or the other, or a combination of the two. An important resource from the REAP Curriculum that has been used widely by programs has been the concept of Reverse Budgeting, especially for survivors who are in shelter or who have not yet left their abusive partner.

With Reverse Budgeting, clients begin first thinking about their living expenses - what they need to survive - rather than their income. Once they have created a detailed outline of their expenses, they calculate what they will need to earn to meet those expenses.

Reverse Budgeting will give the advocate and the survivor an idea of how much they must earn. For those who do have employment, it will help them understand if their income will be enough to cover expenses. Often, the projected expenses are higher than what the client earns or will likely earn. In those cases, advocates can work with client to identify ways to reduce her expenses or to potentially increase her income. This process can be repeated every few months, as budgets often change from month to month. The goal is to create a realistic budget that can be used as a tool to help the client understand her finances and eventually reach her goals.

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