Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Technology Safety Project Third Year Report

Findings and Recommendations

"A large number of women are looking for and using resources found on the Internet. Having a "safe" place to research resources plays a significant role in their ability to improve their situation. "

June, 2007

Technology Safety Program Evaluation for Year 2006-2007

Project Background/Methodology

Technology plays an important and valuable role in our everyday lives. Today, communication is immediate, and the ability to research resources can be virtually "at your fingertips." As technology advances and more information becomes available online through public records and personal disclosure, it is even more important to educate consumers about privacy in the age of technology.

Technology used as a strategic tool is new to domestic violence and sexual assault advocacy. Educating domestic and sexual violence advocates about the benefits and risks of technology to build a solid base of knowledge on the issues is critical to helping survivors access needed resources and plan for their safety.

All sites were selected from an open application process. Each site designated a "Tech Advocate" that was paid by the project to provide training and technical assistance to advocates and survivors. These advocates were given direct training by the project manager. The intention was to institute a "train-the-trainer" type program to encourage agencies to continue their education process beyond grant funding.

Technology Advocates working in pilot sites engaged survivors in the project at an appropriate time during service provision at their agency, by utilizing the PowerPoint presentation *Survivor's Guide to Technology Safety*. This guide educates survivors on utilizing technology to access resources and information, and includes tips on how technology can be used to monitor an individual's activities.

Tech Advocates at pilot sights also utilized pieces of the PowerPoint presentation in support group settings over a period of time to increase awareness and encourage clients to access the pilot site computer to develop new skills, research resources, and practice "safer" technology techniques.

The *Survivor's Guide* asks clients to voluntarily fill out a pre-evaluation on current knowledge and comfort level with various technology. Upon completion of the presentation, they are asked to fill out a post-evaluation of the information presented. The guide provides a direct hyperlink to a password-protected, web-based survey. Clients completed the survey either online or on paper, and the Tech Advocates ensured that all responses were entered into the web-based system.

To facilitate survivors' direct access to the Internet and other resources, each pilot site was provided with a computer, all-in-one printer/fax/scanner/copier, Internet access, additional phone line if necessary, and Microsoft Office Professional software. The project budget provided for equipment, installation, additional computer support if needed, and Internet access for one year from the date of site installation.

In order to assess our progress to date, the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence contracted with Jerry Finn, University of Washington School of Social Work (Tacoma), to independently evaluate the project data. His independent report can be found on pages 6-7 of this report.

To date, the Technology Safety Project has a total of 18 pilot sites: five that were installed during Year 1, seven during Year 2, and six sites in Year 3. All sites are being monitored as they progress into sustainability beyond grant-supported activities. Sites are monitored through email, phone, and if necessary, on-site support from the project manager. See our spreadsheet on computer locations for more information on Year 3 pilot sites located on page 8 of this report.

State and National Work

Washington State continues to be a leader in bringing education and information on technology benefits and risks to a grassroots level. Nationally, this project is seen as a model for other states. During this reporting period, the *Survivor's Guide to Technology Safety* has been modified so that all state-level domestic violence and sexual assault coalitions in the country can access it through our national partner's pass-protected web page (National Network to End Domestic Violence SafetyNet Project, www.nnedv.org), with an evaluation tool that will collect statistics nationally and individually for each state utilizing this resource. The Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence has already been in contact with the program manager about deploying this tool to its member programs.

Requests for technical assistance on technology-related stalking have continued to increase, and "word of mouth" about our project's expertise is being seen through requests for information and training from various groups other than our advocate and grassroots agencies. Trainings have been provided locally and nationally to community groups, domestic violence summits, crime victim's advocates, law enforcement and prosecutors. The program manager attended a legislative subgroup on issues relating to implementing legislation on radio-frequency identification (RFID) technology during the 2007 Washington State legislative session to advocate for victim protections from potential stalking use.

Major Accomplishments

Reaching survivors and allies with information on technology safety in a variety of settings. Since the inception of this project, advocates at pilot sites have provided training and/or information to survivors, individual staff and volunteers on the benefits and risks of technology. To date, the statistics are impressive:

Individuals not in shelter or not in support group	1176
Individuals in group sessions or discussions	719
Staff/volunteers	513
Individuals in shelter	729

Many women seeking information on safety and resources are provided services in domestic violence offices on a walk-in, one-time basis. Others are seen on a more long-term basis, such as when they need shelter or participate in weekly or monthly group advocacy. The totals above show that our pilot sites have reached 2,624 survivors and allies with technology safety information that will positively impact their safety planning process as they continue to look for and access needed resources and information.

Access to technology helps survivor's research options.
Almost all participants (91.7%) learned tips for safer technology use. The survey results also showed that approximately two-thirds (65.1%) of the respondents made progress on connecting with community resources through the use of this program.

Safe access increased survivor's independence through employment and skills training.
A large majority (69.5%) of the participants learned new job skills, were looking for employment opportunities, or using the computer to help find a job. Advocates reported that clients' direct use of the computer and Internet access at the pilot sites increased their ability to help more clients in crisis because survivors could research their own options.

Safety planning.
As indicated by the pre/post evaluations from survivors, a sizeable number of survivors are harassed and monitored by abusers in their electronic communication. Almost all survivors accessing this program (95.6%) indicated that they knew "more" or "a great deal more" after participating in the tech safety project than they did before on how technology can be used the track them. According to the independent evaluation written by Jerry Finn, University of Washington School of Social Work (Tacoma, WA): ……"The results indicate that technology issues should be a regular part of assessment and safety training for women who use computers. In addition, the results reinforce the need for the Technology Safety Project."

Sharing technology safety with children.
Children have access to technology in a variety of personal, social and school environments. The Technology Safety Project has been successful in educating survivors on the risks technology plays in their safety and the safety of their children. Over half the respondents (52.2%) learned skills they can share with their children. Children often become pawns in abusive relationships in which they are the conduit of information for the abuser. Children also fall victim to stalking and tracking far more often than statistics document. [Liz Claiborne, 2007, Tech Abuse in Teen Relationships Study] Children have an underdeveloped sense of privacy in a vastly web- and data-based world. As surveillance continues to increase due to national security and overzealous marketers, it becomes harder to keep personal information private. Over 52% of survivors that participated in this program felt it necessary to educate their children and teach them new skills regarding technology safety.

Agency training on technology safety.
All pilot sites have committed to adding the *Survivor's Guide* to their list of agency training requirements for advocates and volunteers. The Department of Social and Health Services program manager for domestic violence supports the use of this guide as an advocate training tool for domestic violence agencies.

Sustainability beyond grant funds.
Through a follow-up survey to agencies, 100% of all pilot sites funded by this project have incorporated tech safety into their existing budgets and have sustained the project beyond grant funding.

Challenges

The Technology Safety Project continues to see many of the same challenges in this reporting period as previously. At all sites, advocates struggle with a chaotic, crisis-oriented service environment in which unpredictable shelter stays and widely diverse client needs make it difficult to maximize the benefits of the project for all individuals. In agencies that are not pilot sites, technology issues become a low priority, even though data shows that educating survivors on tech issues is timely and needed. The lack of "safe" computers for client use in agencies can mean agencies are not as motivated to incorporate tech safety into existing services. To continue engaging our members, the program manager writes a "Geek Girl Tech Tips" column for the WSCADV monthly newsletter that discusses emerging technology safety issues. Our newsletter is distributed via email to over 600 recipients which include member programs, individuals and ally agencies. Samples are available upon request.

Language barriers make it difficult to incorporate tech safety information into existing services. The *Survivor's Guide* was translated into five different languages last year by the Washington Violence Against Women's Network. Many agencies have requested translation into Russian, which we do not have. The pre- and post-evaluations were not translated. Funding to translate needed languages as well as pre/post evaluations could potentially give us more accurate demographic information and ability to reach additional underserved populations.

Although the *Survivor's Guide* discusses the resources and benefits of technology, clients experience both fear and learning. Trying to balance the use of technology for resources and lessen the fear of being stalked and tracked helps encourage clients to engage in research and Internet activities that would help them gain skills, knowledge and independence.

Lack of resources on technology-related stalking among law enforcement agencies, probation departments and the judicial system creates barriers to survivors receiving adequate protection. It is imperative that allies are educated and resourced to protect survivors.

With the implementation of HMIS (Homeless Management Information System) from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), as well as Regional Homeless Management Plans instituted on a state level, agencies are struggling with their local Continua of Care to participate in the data collection without tracking individuals specifically. Agencies are aware of the safety issues survivors face if they are being tracked in any system. In 2006, reauthorization of the federal *Violence Against Women Act* (VAWA) specifically prohibits personally identifying information from being collected and shared by domestic violence and sexual assault agencies. We know that many victims find food and shelter through other homelessness organizations and may not benefit from the specific protections granted under VAWA. It is important to educate our allied organizations on this issue.

Project Adjustments

The project implemented one additional pilot site in 2006. The availability of funds in the project budget, due to under spending on anticipated costs, allowed us to add an additional site in 2006 and extend the contracts on all second-year sites for five months of paid Technology Safety Advocate support (internet expenses were not included). We were also able to purchase two computers for each Year 3 site to accommodate the expected increase in client volume in urban areas. The *Survivor's Guide* was updated to include more information on social networking, as well as cell phone data and security. Unfortunately, the updates in other languages could not be funded at this time.

Key Discoveries

Open-ended comments on the web-based survey by a vast majority of participants describe increased technology safety awareness, knowledge and skills. Many reported their intention to change specific behavior related to safer computer use. In fact, 68.9% of the respondents who participated in the Technology Safety Project training increased their confidence and ability to protect their privacy and personal information on the Internet or while using computers.

A large number of women are looking for and using resources found on the Internet. Having a "safe" place to research resources plays a significant role in their ability to improve their situation. In comparison, 64.1% improved their ability to connect with community services and resources, as opposed to 55.2% last year. Also, 22.9% of survivors used technology to meet their housing goals, an increased from 16.4% reported last year.

The statistics also indicate that over half of the participants are using the computer to learn job skills (57.2%) and over half (52.7%) used the computer and Internet to search for employment opportunities. Our advocates reported that women accessing the computer sometimes participated in online classes or programs that would increase their skills and knowledge in the workplace.

A sizable minority of the survey respondents have been harassed and monitored in their electronic communications. Of those, approximately one-fourth (25.1%) had their

browser history monitored; 23.6% had been repeatedly threatened, insulted or harassed by email; 18% had someone who monitored their emails; and 17% had someone use their PIN or password to gain access to a private email account. Since the survey results allowed the respondents to choose all categories that apply, we can assume more than one type of electronic harassment was experienced. Even though Washington State enacted a cyberstalking law (RCW 9.61.260) in 2004, these types of crimes are believed to be underreported by victims and/or under investigated by law enforcement.

Almost 1 in 10 survivors had someone use their Social Security number or financial information to make online purchases without their knowledge. Yet only 30% of the respondents listed personal finance and management via computer as important to learn. Even through respondents may not participate in programs such as online banking or bill paying, they are most likely being targeted by their abusers. Abusers often destroy a survivor's credit cards or ruin their credit history to hinder their independence. Survivors need more specialized information and practical guides on warding off identity theft in the context of the dynamics and tactics abusers use in an intimate partner relationship, as opposed to "stranger" identity theft and fraud.

Media attention on the use of social networking sites increased survivors' interest in learning more about technology safety for their children, as reported through phone interviews with Tech Advocates. Our demographics show that 75.6% of the respondents have children, and 42.3% of those have children ages 13+, who are more likely to access the Internet and social networking sites. The statistics show that 43.8% of respondents learned skills they can share with their children. Keeping mom and kids safe means training children about privacy. It can be easy to find survivors through their children's social networking profile and information that is posted on the Internet. Advocates reported that social networking sites were being used by abusers to violate no-contact or protection orders.

Report Findings:

- Overall, the training program is very successful and meets an important need.
- The training is needed given the proportion of women who have experienced technology-related difficulties.
- Providing *safe* access to computers and the Internet is seen as valuable by survivors.
- Many survivors are using technology, especially cell phones, computers and the Internet.
- The training was seen as highly useful by a majority of participants and results in improved awareness, feelings of safety and confidence in using technology.
- Survivors believe that women need technology safety information.
- The training supported victims and survivors in meeting needs such as job hunting, learning job skills, housing and connecting with community resources.
- Additional training and materials are requested by participants. Brochures, posters, booklets and video-based materials should be considered in order to reinforce learning and encourage participants to teach others what they have learned.