



Domestic
Violence
Services
Community
Conversations
Sessions

eliminating racism
empowering women

ywca

YWCA IS ON A MISSION

Background to the Project

Started in Fall 2019

Originated from Parent Leadership program of Worcester Community Connections Coalition of YOU Inc., an affiliate of the Seven Hills Foundation

Aim to assess gaps in community response to DV as protective factor to Intimate Partner Violence homicides.

16 community conversations were held between 2019 – 2021.

YWCA conducted two surveys: service providers, and community members.

Community Conversation Participants

Provider Group

Coordinated
Community Response
Network (CCRN)

The Community Health
Network of North
Central Massachusetts
(CHNA 9)

Worcester Social
Services Providers

Gardner Social Services
Providers

Department of Children
and Families (DCF)

YWCA Central Mass
Domestic Violence
Steering Committee

LIFT

Community groups

- **Everyday Miracles**
- **Latinas Unidas en Accion parents**
- **Voices of Truth**
- **African Catholic Community**
- **Our Deaf Survivors and Center for Living and Working**
- **North Central Massachusetts LGBTQ support group**

Findings: Emerging Themes from Community Conversations and Surveys.



A lack of adequate, safe housing for survivors of domestic violence

Insufficient & ineffective communication among providers & no continuum of care for survivors.

Mistrust between domestic violence survivors & support institutions. Victim blaming of survivors at support institutions showing a need for more DV training needed

Lack of easily obtainable information regarding victim rights & legal processes.

Access to Safe Housing



“My biggest fear is that I can’t leave him because how am I going to support myself and the children? It eventually got so bad that I had to leave, or I would die. Housing needs to come quicker. I got on a housing list, but it took 2 years.”(DV Survivor)

Gaps in housing services

“Emergency help is needed, something immediate, not an appointment - a place for someone to go right then and there.”

“There are not enough shelters for survivors.”

COVID-19 pandemic caused increase volatility in many abusive relationships & limited access safe housing.

Survivors needing emergency housing often only given option of either going into a homeless shelter or a domestic violence shelter.

Both options are imperfect and have long waiting lists.

Gaps in housing services

“People have vouchers but still cannot find a place to stay” because landlords are choosing not to house survivors of domestic violence.”

“We need immediate emergency rental, utility assistance, and emergency relocation costs for survivors.”

“Very little resources for unhoused LGBTQ+ individuals (both youth and adults).”

Need for stable long-term housing instead of offering short term options.

Hotels offer refuge but are not sustainable and do not provide a long-term option.

Section 8 Housing Program and low-income rental vouchers have long waitlist.

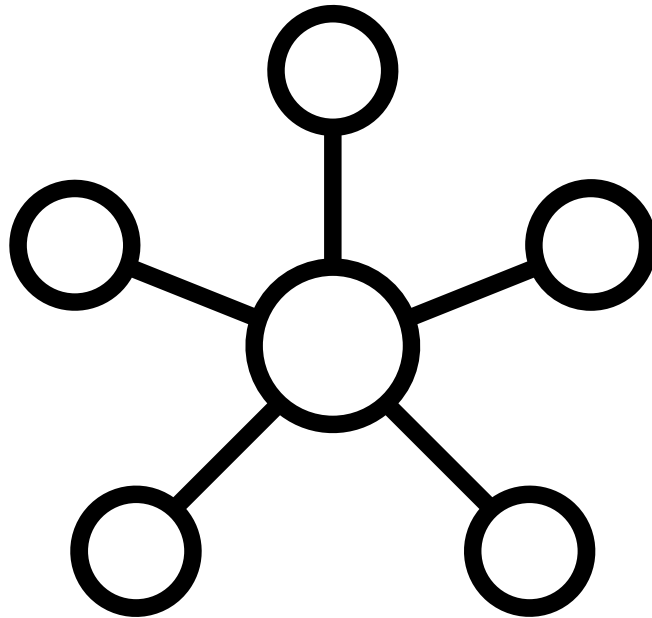
Many landlords discriminate against low-income families and avoid renting to them.

Lack of housing options for LGBTQ+ domestic violence survivors.

DV shelters can be difficult places for individuals identifying as LGBTQ+ because of homophobic staff & stigma of domestic violence not being a problem in the LGBTQ+ community.

Need for safe environments that provides welcoming and non-stigmatizing services to all participants regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity.

Interagency Communication and a Coordinated Continuum of Care



“It is hard to navigate these systems, the systems do not work together, and each system has its barriers, all these barriers come together and make it even harder for survivors.”

Gaps in communication services



Lack of communication between DV agencies, government departments, and community-based organizations supporting victims/survivors.

Lack of communication negatively impacts survivors/victims' safety and creates barriers to accessing supportive services and a continuum of care.

Few inter-agency referrals.

Gaps in services: Continuum of Care - wraparound supportive services



- **Lack of a coordinated entry process and a comprehensive community response system that addresses specific areas of domestic violence services was highlighted as having a negative impact on survivor's feeling supported and having access to appropriate services.**

Mistrust between domestic violence survivors & supportive institutions



- **“Many mothers (survivors) fear that their children will be removed if they report domestic violence”**
- **“There is a lack of trust in these systems, will they report me if I tell them what I need/what’s going on.”**
- **“Black and Brown people cannot trust some institutions, and this is a huge issue.”**
- **“Latino women are afraid to reach out for help if they are undocumented for fear deportation.”**
- **LGBTQ+ couples do not feel heard or believed by some institutions.**

Gaps in services: Mistrust

Mistrust resulting from:

Use of victim blaming language

Fear of victimization by certain institutions

Victims reported 51A filing due to police involvement

Victims reported being blamed for neglect even though they reached out for help.

Children being removed from the home because of domestic violence.

51A report creating additional risks for victims.

“Often, the caretaker is overwhelmed & unable to take action. 51A penalize the victim for a perceived inability to keep the children safe.”

Gaps in services: Mistrust

“There are circumstances which may indicate a mandated report is not appropriate. Mandated reporters are encouraged to assess carefully the caretaker’s and child’s conditions and to evaluate whether community services and support will strengthen the caretaker’s resolve and ability to safeguard the child.”

| Year | enrolled | Won't call police again | percentage | Children removed due to DV | percentage |
|-----------------------------|----------|-------------------------|------------|----------------------------|------------|
| 2018-2019 | 378 | 27 | 7% | 150 | 40% |
| 2019-2020 | 547 | 25 | 10% | 108 | 20% |
| 2020-2021 (June – March) | 432 | 13 | 3% | 71 | 16% |

Institutional Victim Blaming

| | |
|------|---|
| Use | of victim blaming language by providers which implies that the victim provoked the abusive person in some way, could have prevented the abuse, and/or allowed the abusive behavior to happen or continue. |
| Use | of language and attitude by providers that reinforces manipulative tactics like abusive behaviors, used for control. Prohibiting victims from reaching out for help. |
| Lack | of understanding of the complexities of the dynamics of abuse resulting blaming victims and denial in the access to justice. |

“I felt victimized time after time while trying to seek justice.”

“The abuser gets a slap on the wrist and the victim is scrutinized and judged for their actions. While trying to defend herself. The system has to change.”

Victim Rights

- “DV survivors don’t know about laws that protect them from employment. Survivors are forced to attend court and ultimately lose their jobs. Abusers are using the courts to control.”
- “Most survivors don’t know what’s available to them in terms of legal rights.”
- “Property managers aren’t familiar with VAWA requirements and victims are getting evicted. Survivors aren’t aware of their victims’ rights. There is a huge gap with knowledge.”
- “Many people, including myself, are denied restraining orders in court, this can lead to death.”

“Prosecutors rated a victim as cooperative or non-cooperative following a brief conversation.”

DV Training/Information

- “Many workers lack an understanding of trauma. There needs to be more training on DV trauma-informed care.”
- There is an expectation that if someone is in services that they’ll end the abusive relationships
- “Lack of awareness in the community of DV services available.”



Language Barriers

Lack of domestic violence education, resources, and services for non-English speaking individuals.

“There is a lack of resources in Spanish.”

“More services are needed for immigrants and non-English-speaking people.”

Participants feel that they have been mistreated and discriminated against because they do not speak English

“Accommodation issues for people that are hard of hearing, blind, have ambulatory issues, and language barriers.”

“Major concern with Spanish interpreters interpreting correctly—a young girl felt like she wasn’t heard, “I’m scared vs. I fear for my life”, the court may have failed interpreting for this young woman.”

In a participant’s opinion, “At least 90% of police officers do not speak Spanish and most of the Latino population in Worcester does not speak English. Therefore, there is a big gap in communication that can lead to serious misunderstandings when police respond to a DV call.”

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Insufficient safe housing.

Lack of communication between providers and absence of a coordinated continuum of care for survivors.

Mistrust between domestic violence survivors and the institutions that are supposed to support them.

Lack of accessible information for victims regarding their rights and legal processes.

Language barriers to accessing information and services

Inconsistent training of individuals particularly with a specific focus on trauma informed practices. I.e.. Victim blaming of survivors

Presence of institutional language that blames DV victims for the exposure of their children to domestic violence

Questions



Thank You